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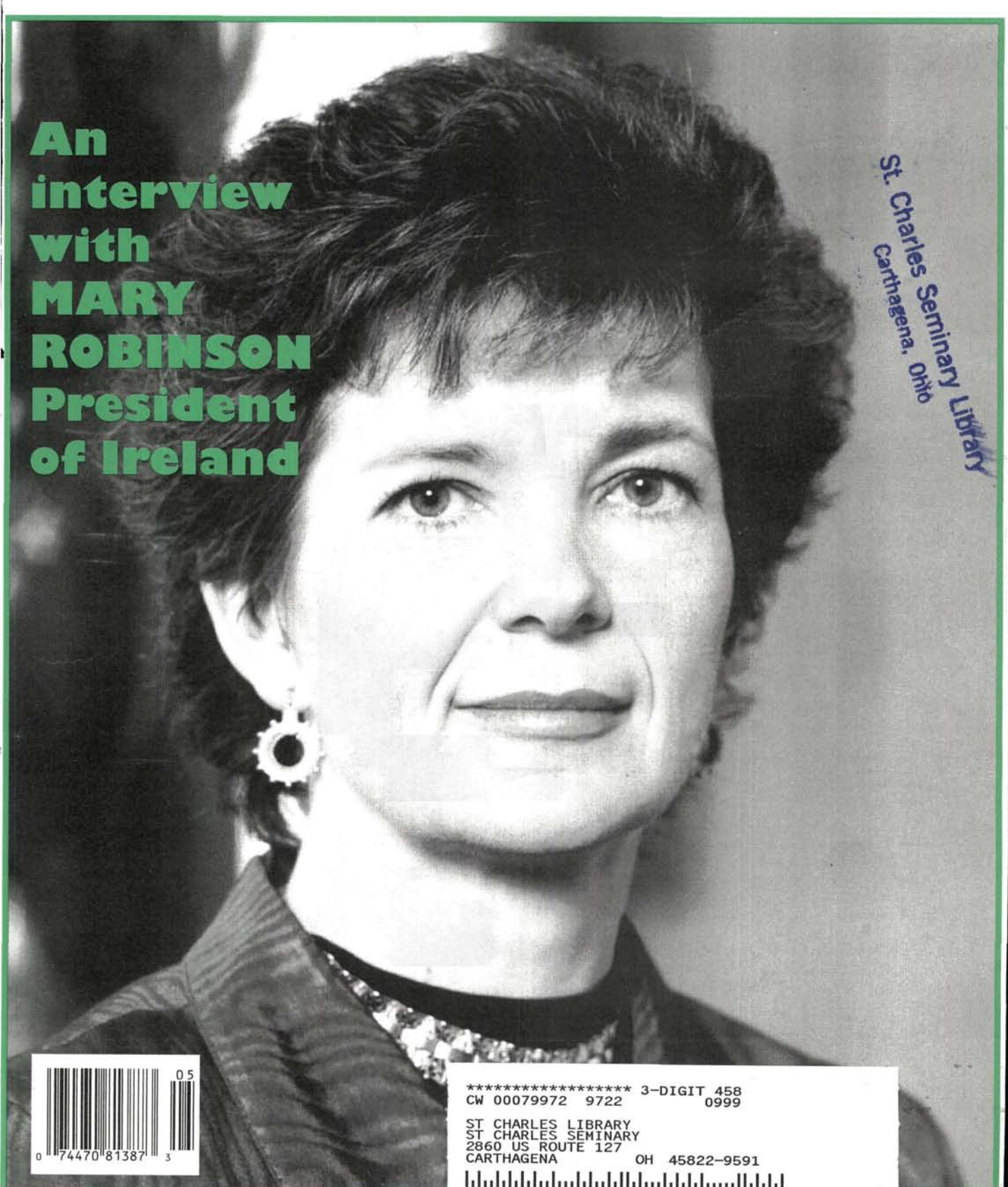

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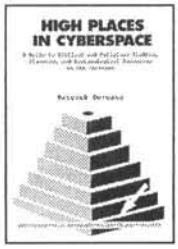

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COMMONWEAL

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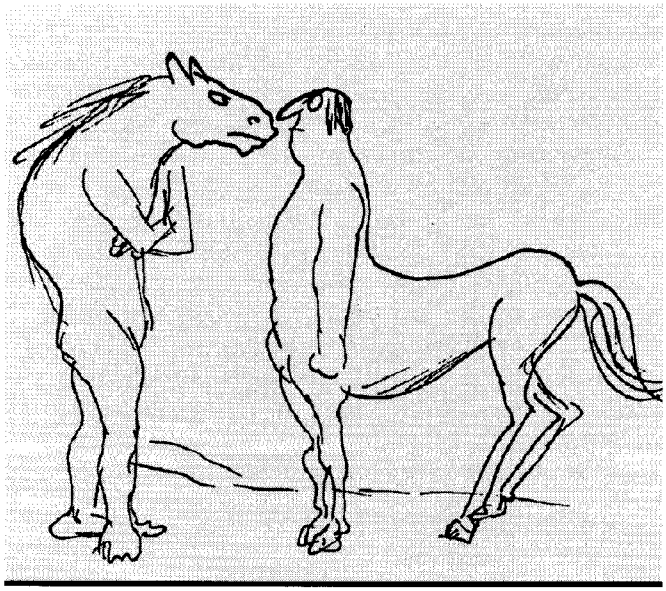

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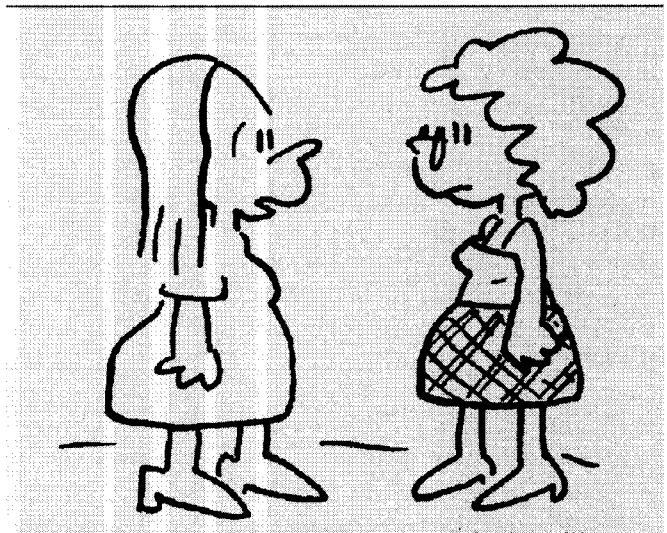

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To the Editors

Christianity & Buddhism

In his insightful article, "When Christianity and Buddhism Meet" [January 12], John W. Healey ponders the question, "What does my Christianity add to my Buddhism?" Believing that his practice of Zen Buddhism has significantly influenced his Christian faith, Healey concludes that it will be a while before Christianity adds to Buddhism. Similarly, Bede Griffiths, a Benedictine scholar long resident in India, believed that the integration of Buddhism and Christianity is the work of the next thousand years. It is not difficult to agree with Healey's assumption that right now Buddhism seems to add to rather than receive from Christianity.

It is certainly possible that at this point in history, Buddhism, like Judaism and Islam, asks little from Christianity and there is little Christianity can offer Buddhism. Humbling though this may be to Christians, it does offer us, nonetheless, a grace-filled opportunity: It challenges us to live most intently a Christ-like life among our Buddhist brothers and sisters, to pray with attention, and to work for justice with diligence. What the Buddhists make of this is not for us to decide. Remember that Peter was rebuffed when he asked about Jesus' plan for another disciple: "What is that to you? You follow me."

Healey's reference to John P. Keenan's "courageous" if not completely successful attempt to read Christology through a Buddhist lens recalls his own experience that Buddhist practice helped him "come home in a new way to [his] Christian faith." Both Healey and Keenan encourage Christians in ways that no one since Gregory of Nyssa should find objectionable: Christians are not only to teach all nations but be taught by all nations. Before we speak we are to listen respectfully and allow ourselves to be changed by what we hear. To be so open engenders a grateful responsiveness to the gifts Buddhism offers, among them a deepening and watchful silence that can lead us to insight. Of course we are not to accept "relativism" or an uncritical reading of Buddhist thought.

In their recent thirty-fourth General Congregation, Jesuits urged one another and all Christians to acknowledge, preserve, and promote the spiritual goods found in other religions. We are to recognize that the core of religion is its capacity to lead people to a deeper religious experience; we are to foster dialogues of experience whenever possible. Indeed we are to join hands with those of other faiths and work for justice and peace. Doing this, we must remember that the material needs of our neighbors are our spiritual needs, and that the return to the marketplace and to the corporal works of mercy must be done right now—today.

ROBERT E. KENNEDY, S.J.
Jersey City, N.J.

Trust the process

John Healey's "When Christianity and Buddhism Meet" is a fine example of a growing genre of Christian writing. Buddhism, more powerfully than any other religious tradition, challenges us to rethink, reimagine, and reexperience our Christian faith. Healey writes beautifully of how it has affected him and also of what it has done for John Keenan. There is no question but that Catholics are in the lead in this important venture.

Today it is best to stand loose to any particular conclusions Buddhism encourages that nonattachment to our own views. Catholics often find a point of contact in the apophatic mystical tradition and see Buddhism as enabling them to realize its meaning more deeply. That can either render the historical particularities of Christian faith of secondary importance or bring them to the fore with new power.

In my case the Buddhist doctrine that all that is is to be understood as dependently co-arising encourages the rethinking of God as the supreme instance of such co-arising, that is, as the creative synthesis of all that is possible and all that is actual. That leads in a quite kataphatic direction instead.

There are no rights and wrongs here. We learn from the other what we are able to hear and appropriate. Because we are meeting Buddhism at a time when the modern world in which we have lived is crumbling, we are open to transformation in the encounter. Let us trust that process even when we cannot know where it will lead us. Perhaps in this transformation we will live more deeply into Christ.

JOHN B. COBB, JR.
Claremont, Calif.

Overkill in Rome

Not having read Tissa Balasuriya's book, I haven't a clue as to whether his theology is orthodox or heterodox [editorial, January 31]. But I think Harry Truman had it right when he asked, "Why use explosives if ant powder will do?"

Does the Cardinal Prefect have no regard for the cardinal virtues of prudence and justice? Does it make no difference what all our ecumenical partners think of this type of "due process" that summarily declares that one of our elder brothers is now cast out of our community of brotherly love because he sought to explicate the word of God in a way that could be understood by those who had never appreciated the mystery of Christ?

A better way might be: Come, let us reason together.

ANDREW GALLIGAN
Tracy, Calif.

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There goes everybody

Anathemas to our right, anathemas to our left. What's a Catholic to think?

As noted in this space ("Bad Karma," January 31), the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's excommunication of theologian Tissa Balasuriya raised troubling questions about due process in the church even while it reminded us of the need to defend doctrine and draw boundaries. To be sure, Balasuriya's theology seems much in need of elemental, if fraternal correction. How to combine the fraternal with the rigorous is the hard part. Yet the future intellectual vitality of the church depends on how that balance is worked out. It is not a new problem. As Cardinal Newman wrote, in theology there is always "the risk of corruption from intercourse with the world around...[but] such a risk must be encountered if a great idea is duly to be understood, and much more if it is to be fully exhibited."

How dangerous intellectual timidity and the mere veneration of authority for its own sake can be is sadly evident in the recent treatment of moral theologian Richard McCormick, S.J., by the archbishop of New Orleans, Francis Shulte. Learning that the intellectually provocative McCormick was to speak to the New Orleans Notre Dame Club, Schulte let it be known that "some persons might find objections" to the theologian's visit. To its discredit, the Notre Dame Club promptly rescinded its invitation. When his unwarranted intervention was questioned by McCormick, Shulte offered an embarrassingly pusillanimous explanation, suggesting that McCormick's presence would bring polarization to his otherwise blissfully tranquil archdiocese.

One can disagree with Richard McCormick's theological method or ethical conclusions (in general, we do not), but his devotion to the church and his standing as a Catholic theologian are beyond serious dispute. McCormick, long the John A. O'Brien Professor of Christian Ethics at the University of Notre Dame, is under no ecclesiastical ban or censure. Indeed, McCormick's intellectual integrity is an inspiration, hardly a handicap, to the church, and a resource not to be squandered in the effort to curtail abortions and the threat of legalized euthanasia. Archbishop Shulte's unprovoked and unexplained action is the real scandal to the faithful.

Fraternal correction, when justified, need not be solely the province of the hierarchy. American Catholics opposed to current abortion practice have long felt unfairly undermined by the efforts of Catholics for a Free Choice, and especially its president, Frances Kissling. At times, Kissling has seemed to be a one-woman quotation factory, sure to show up with misleading assessments in every major news story about Catholics and abortion. Kissling has now taken her crusade to England, where the lay Catholic weekly *The Tablet* greeted CFFC with a richly deserved British frostiness ("Bad Company for Reformers," *The Tablet*, February 8). *The Tablet*'s editorial reminds Catholic liberals and progressives that they need not accept Kissling's hardline prochoice group as a fitting ally. For Catholics working for reform in the church, "there could be no step more likely to ensure the discrediting of their efforts than for them to align themselves with those who reject the right to life of the unborn child."

As these three cases suggest, the responsibilities and authority of the laity and

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the hierarchy are not identical, yet both share responsibility for the faithfulness and integrity of the church. How hierarchical authority is exercised and to what extent the laity assumes responsibility for church teaching are fundamental measures of that faithfulness. Neither can work well without the other, and neither should take the other for granted.

PARTIAL TRUTH

When President Bill Clinton vetoed a bill banning partial-birth abortions last April, he said the procedure was necessary for a "small but extremely vulnerable group of women and families in this country, just a few hundred a year." In fact, there were and are no reliable statistics on how many women have partial-birth abortions or whether they have them in the second or third trimester. The Center for Disease Control does not gather statistics on abortion methods. But over the whole long debate that preceded the veto and the subsequent attempt to override it, few in the media went looking for the numbers or examined the testimony available from doctors who admitted they used the method on healthy mothers with healthy fetuses.

Clinton got his information from abortion-rights proponents and the stories of the several women who appeared with him when he vetoed the bill, some of whom may not actually have had a partial-birth abortion (*see*, *Commonweal* editorials, April 19 and May 3, and correspondence with one of the women who appeared with the president, June 14, 1996).

Now a year later, Ron Fitzsimmons, head of the National Coalition of Abortion Providers, and one of the abortion proponents who supplied that information, says he "lied through my teeth" when he said the procedure was rarely used and then only in cases in which there was a threat either to the mother's life or of fetal deformity. Reacting to Fitzsimmons's change of testimony, other abortion-rights leaders say they have not lied, but they admitted when questioned by reporters that partial-birth abortions were performed in the second trimester, but not on healthy women with healthy fetuses.

Prolife advocates were accused of lying. Helen Alvare of the Bishops' Prolife Committee, who claimed the number of such abortions might be in the thousands rather than the hundreds, was subjected to a particularly ill-informed interrogation by Ed Bradley on "60 Minutes." It now appears that prolifers were more accurate, though like the rest of us they have no hard numbers. Some say the numbers aren't important and that "both sides manipulated the facts" (*New York Times*, March 3, 1997). Not so.

An abortion method that is infanticide in all but name is wrong, whether one baby's life is ended or three thousand. But something else is at stake. In the midst of a political struggle over abortion, it has become clear that no party—not Congress, not the president, not the media—made it their business to uncover the basic facts. A new bill banning partial-birth abortions will be introduced in this session of Congress. If witnesses testify under oath, this time there is a chance that politicians will get their facts straight before they vote and before they veto. Then President Clinton should drop his opposition to what is in fact a very modest restriction on abortion practice in the United States.

OF SEVERAL MINDS

ABIGAIL McCARTHY

L'AFFAIRE MADELEINE

Her parents did right

For many Americans it was the "Old World," and our forebears had left it behind to begin again in the "New." Those who came freely seldom looked back. Americans looked to the future, not the past. It was as if the oceans that separated us from our places of origin—the Atlantic and now the Pacific as well—also separated us from the ties and the limitations imposed by history and custom in those places. We became part of a new people.

That being true of most of us, it is something of a puzzle that the revelation that Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's Czechoslovakian grandparents were Jewish has become such a *cause célèbre*. Why was such a personal matter headlined on the front page of the *Washington Post* (January 12, 1997), whose reporters evidently uncovered the facts? And why was it made the lead story of the *Post*'s magazine (February 9, 1997), complete with a scarcely flattering cover picture of the secretary?

The implication was surely that the religion of her grandparents was relevant to her qualifications for the office of secretary of state—that her approach to matters concerning Israel, for example, might be compromised by her personal history. It is interesting and ironic that the ambassador of Israel's most implacable enemy, Syria, was quick to scotch that idea. "We never look to the religion of any official or envoy," said Ambassador Walid al-Moalem. "We look at his position....We are glad to deal with Madam Secretary Albright," he added, "as long as she understands the realities. We will not ask about her faith, but about her position."

In the past, those who published the news of Albright's grandparents would surely have held that Jewishness was not a matter of blood but of religion. (Interestingly enough, there was no speculation that her having been brought up Catholic might affect her attitudes on foreign policy.) Albright's parents were

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not unique in abandoning the synagogue. Secularized and assimilated Jews held high positions in most European countries, as did Albright's father, a Czechoslovakian diplomat. At the time he joined the foreign service he declared he was "without religious confession," meaning he did not practice any faith. He and his wife converted to Catholicism around the time of World War II and were practicing Catholics throughout Madeleine's childhood.

One suspects that the real concern is that somehow Albright's parents, by their conversion and their silence about the past, betrayed the victims of the Holocaust. In this country the reaction of many assimilated Jews to the Holocaust was a reaffirmation of their Jewish heritage. Many may now find Albright's tentative acceptance of her family's past and her proud defense of her parents' decision difficult to accept.

"My parents were fabulous people who did everything they could for their children and brought us to this amazing country and were protective, overly so in terms of worrying about us and all kinds of things. I can't question their motivation. I can't. I don't know how else to put it" (*Washington Post Magazine*).

Albright's ignorance of her past may simply stem from the fact that, like many other first-generation Americans, her parents put the past behind them. Or, what is more likely, she like many other "children of the Holocaust," as the director of Washington's Holocaust Museum calls them, was protected from the knowledge of a heritage that too often proved lethal. The knowledge that one was "a child of the Holocaust" could be a terrible burden. I think of two among those I have known.

One was a child of five when the Nazis invaded Austria. Her father was an official of the Central Bank in Vienna. The family lived in a spacious apartment. There was a cook, a maid, and a blond Austrian nanny for her. She remembers the sudden change in atmosphere when she could no longer go to the park with her nanny. Then one night her father had a phone call and her parents hurried her out to the street where all three were hustled into a car which sped up and whisked them away. A Gauleiter, for whom her father had done a favor, had seen their names on the deportation list for that day and had arranged their escape. They were taken over the border to Italy with nothing but the clothes on their backs and a little money.

Her next memory was of being in a cold-water flat in New York and walking down five flights hoping to play with the children she saw from the window, only to be driven back by their bullying jeers because she was "different." Her family eventually went to Argentina where her father recouped a modest fortune. They returned to this country where she was educated and married the son of a prominent and wealthy Jewish family. A happy ending—except that in her thirties she was overcome with the often occurring "survivor's guilt" and suffered a complete breakdown from which she was years recovering.

Another "child of the Holocaust," a popular college professor in his forties when I came to know him, had come home from school in Berlin one day when he was a teen-ager to find his father, who was also a banker, scrubbing the street under the threatening supervision of a storm trooper who had been the janitor in their building. His parents disappeared soon afterwards. He was saved and brought to America by some prominent Jewish families who had bartered with the Reich: a convoy of trucks in exchange for the lives of children! One Sunday afternoon when we were visiting he began describing his experience. His wife, astounded, drew me aside—he had never discussed it before, she said. For over twenty years he had borne the burden in silence. One can only imagine the corrosive suffering.

Madeleine Albright, thanks to her parents' strategy, was spared the knowledge of her connection to the Holocaust as a child. She bears her connection with it now as a fully mature human being. It will not change the mindset of which she has often spoken: "The mindset of most of my contemporaries is Vietnam. My mindset is Munich." In other words, the world would be very different if Hitler had been stopped earlier. This presupposes an activist foreign policy in support of human rights and international justice, a policy adopted before she knew of her Jewish heritage. A concern with human rights and international justice is to her a quintessentially American concern, as Albright made clear when interviewed on "60 Minutes." Her personal loyalty is to the parents who made her American. How could it be otherwise? □

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MRS. PRESIDENT

An interview with Ireland's Mary Robinson

Gary MacEoin

I am of Ireland; come dance with me in Ireland. *With those words Mary Teresa Winifred Robinson ended her inaugural address, December 3, 1990, as seventh president and first woman president of Ireland. She promised in that speech that the Ireland she represented would be "open, tolerant, inclusive."*

The Constitution of Ireland provides that the president "shall take precedence over all other persons in the state." Yet under the parliamentary system of government inherited from the British, President Robinson is outside and above politics. Her role is principally symbolic, but her imagination, vision, and commitment have given it substance. And moral leadership comes from her personality, her history, and her interests.

Having been to the U.S. Embassy in Dublin, ringed with concrete pillars to prevent car bomb attacks, and with metal detectors and handbag searchers inside, I was impressed that a single unarmed Garda checked visitors to Arus an Uachtarain (the presidential residence). A herd of Charollais cattle grazed nearby. A profusion of flowers bordered neat lawns. A candle shone in the upper-floor window of the kitchen in which Robinson starts her work day at 7 A.M. by making breakfast for her family. Reminiscent of the Irish tradition of a candle in the window on Christmas Eve to light Joseph and Mary to the inn, it is her way of inviting the Irish emigrant home.

GARY MACEOIN: What made you think you could break into the all-male club of the presidency?

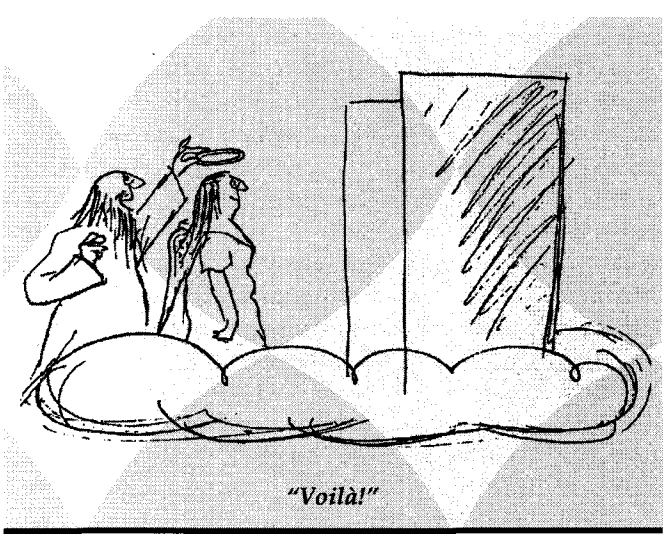
■ MARY ROBINSON: When first urged to run for election, I wasn't very enthusiastic. I thought it was outside what I had been involved in, mostly legal matters. Then I reflected that things in Ireland were changing, and that someone who in a broad sense personifies what was happening could help to shape the perceptions of the Irish people. And because the office of president is above and outside politics, it would be possible to do something different. So we campaigned very hard, and the breakthrough was not just for me but for women. It was a great boost for the confidence of women.

MACEOIN: What role do you see for Ireland in the twenty-first century? In particular, what expanded role for Irish women?

■ ROBINSON: Membership in the European Community, now the European Union, has helped Ireland to take its place as a European country with all the member states, including Britain. It has therefore helped the maturing of a good bilateral relationship with Britain, lifting part of the burden of history. It has enabled Ireland to re-find its sense of participation—cultural, political, social—at the European level. I think that also opens up possibilities for Ireland as a European country to look outward—to look particularly, for example, at countries to which a lot of Irish people emigrated, to our links—our human links—with the United States, with Canada, with Australia, with New Zealand. And to look also, because of our history, at our links to the developing countries. All of this has, of course, a bearing on the entire population, but it is an opportunity with special potential for women. It is a time when Irish women can link—as they are linking—through networks. They can do this through having an outward-looking attitude to what's happening to women in other countries, and by being affected by a broader debate.

MACEOIN: How is Irish membership of the European Union affecting social policy on such issues as homosexuality, divorce, abortion?

■ ROBINSON: Thanks to the European Union, we have a much more open climate of discussion and debate, as you can see in the media. It means that we are a more questioning society, perhaps more honestly prepared to address serious issues and problems, more open to the idea that different viewpoints should be heard and respected. At the same time, I don't think we in Ireland have to follow slav-



"Voilà!"

Gary MacEoin *is the author of numerous books, most recently* The People's Church: Bishop Samuel Ruiz and Why He Matters *(Crossroad).*

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ishly what other countries have done. Ireland has its own strengths—in family life, in the local community, in the concept of *meitheal*, a very traditional form of cooperation in rural Ireland. Three or four or five neighbors get together, exchanging labor, farm equipment, and so on. There are strong solidarity overtones. That tradition is being translated today into community self-development.

■ MacEOIN: And how do you see the role of emigration in these changes?

■ ROBINSON: We have long had emigration. But the nature of emigration has changed. With ferries to Britain and the continent, as well as air travel, emigration isn't the cutoff it used to be. In addition, some of our young people are being educated to levels beyond our present capacity to provide the jobs they are qualified to do. So they go abroad. Many want to come back, especially when they have children they would want to be raised in the Irish society and in the Irish educational system. The problem is obviously a top priority of successive Irish governments. It is a matter of creating enough quality jobs while preserving and protecting our environment and the natural asset of an island free from a lot of industrial pollution. I join in the sense of urgency about creating inward-investment jobs, appropriate development, while also fostering local indigenous small industry that can create a lot of jobs, the kind of community self-development that increases the involvement of people. I also think we have to be broader in our idea of what is work and what is a job.

■ MacEOIN: A recent report on sectarianism said that the depth of misunderstanding and lack of contact between the Republic and Northern Ireland is very large. Why is there such great reluctance in the Republic to become involved in the problems of the North?

■ ROBINSON: I think that was more true ten years ago. I have been pleased with the opening of all kinds of links in recent years, especially in 1995, thanks to the peace process. Links are developing between local authorities, between chambers of commerce. Women are networking. There are exchanges of young people, involvement of schools and youth groups. All this is creating more understanding on both sides of the border, as well as between the communities in Northern Ireland. One indicator is the number of groups from Northern Ireland who come to visit me at Arus an Uachtarain.

■ MacEOIN: What are Ireland's most serious ecological problems?

■ ROBINSON: The first thing to recognize is how fortunate we are to be an island off the west coast of Europe, and therefore helped by the prevailing winds to escape the effects of acid rain and other problems. We were also lucky not to have had the same kind of industrial revolution and industry as some other countries. Our problem now is to create employment, but to do it in ways that value our environment. We must encourage energy conservation and sustainable development. Young people are the ones who are most environmentally conscious in Ireland, so that to some extent they are educating their parents. They are tackling issues of waste

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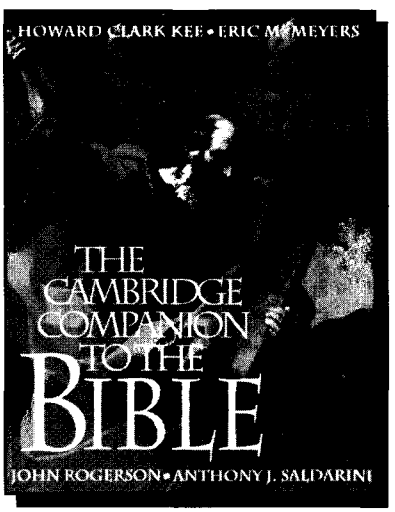

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disposal and so on. The schools help, because they put a lot of stress on environmental awareness. We need more emphasis on linking jobs and economic progress with environmental issues, and not allowing environmentally damaging industries to be brought into the country simply to provide employment. It's not easy to balance. We are attracting high-tech computer software companies that provide jobs matching the improved educational qualities and skills we have. I think that is the way to go.

▩ MACEOIN: What books have been most helpful to you as a leader?

■ ROBINSON: I'm a very wide reader. I read serious books and I read airplane, forgettable books. I never have fewer than four or five books beside my bed at night. I particularly enjoy reading about people who have gone through a personal growth. I was influenced at an early age by Gandhi, and I have read many biographies of him. I have been greatly influenced in the last twenty years by [Nelson] Mandela. It is amazing that he has managed to keep such a balance, that he came out of prison after such a long time as a rounded, holistic person who could reach difficult accommodations with generosity. People I admire have two qualities: a kind of simplicity, and generosity of spirit. It seems to me that the more impressive people are in what they have done, the simpler they tend to be in how they talk to you, or in what they say or write.

▩ MACEOIN: What leaders do you most admire?

■ ROBINSON: I've touched on [Gandhi and Mandela]. Vaclav Havel, president of the Czech Republic, would be another, partly because of his ability to communicate very thoughtful comments on modern society. These are always worth hearing. He has also a great ability to touch people through his plays and to make them think and reflect.

▩ MACEOIN: Ireland has just commemorated the 150th anniversary of the Great Famine. Can we talk a little about its continuing role in the Irish psyche?

■ ROBINSON: It is a period of our history that we need to know in great detail in order to understand its continuing impact on us as a people. Its causes were complex. We can't apportion blame simplistically but rather [must] understand that blame has to be shared in different areas and levels of society. It was the very poorest of the poor, the small tenants and cottiers, who really suffered. Others were less affected. But most of all I welcomed the commemoration because it was a moment to look into our past and realize the courage and resilience of those who survived.

One lesson it can teach us is that there are no inevitable victims, that, for example, those who today go through a similar trauma—whether it's in Rwanda or Somalia or even Bosnia—have a right to a future. When we look back 150 years and see that a million people were forced into exile and another million starved to death in this small island, we must remember that we're not just talking numbers or statistics. Every one of them was a human being with hopes and aspirations that were cut off. It is people who go through suffering that have an empathy for the suffering of others. Many people today in the developed countries are so far removed from poverty and suffering and starvation that they lack empathy for the sufferings of others. That's where this commemoration of the Great Famine helps the Irish people to link with and have a genuine sympathy for the suffering of the victims of contemporary famine and starvation and displacement.

▩ MACEOIN: No doubt it is in that spirit you have visited Somalia and Rwanda and pleaded for starving Somalians at the United Nations. And I understand that you have decided to go back to Rwanda a second time.

■ ROBINSON: One of the hopes I had when I was elected was that the president of Ireland could reach out in humanitarian concern to represent that part of the commitment of the Irish people. As a people, I think, we do have undeniable generosity. Irish aid agencies are working in the most difficult areas. You understand that the presidency is an office without political power and not involved in policymaking. So this is a modest witness of a humanitarian sort. What it can do is present the head of state as a witness, and I have welcomed opportunities to do that.

I felt when I was elected that the most important task on this island was to extend the hand of friendship right across the board to the people of Northern Ireland.

As regards Rwanda, where I was in October 1994, I expressed my concern and my anguish at the United Nations, and I wrote to the heads of states of other countries urging the need to take seriously the commitment made in the Genocide Convention of 1948, because when a genocidal killing occurs, as happened in Rwanda, it is not just an internal domestic matter. The Genocide Convention shows that the world cares enough to make a commitment to investigate, to bring to trial, to break the impunity of those who carry out such acts. I focused on the need to harness resources: the forensic scientists, the scientific evidence, the skills in prosecution, the skills of understanding, the promotion of human rights. Most developed countries have a lot of resources in that area.

What concerns me is that the situation has been deteriorating and there has not been a harnessing of that kind of expertise nor a commitment to really honoring the human-rights pledges made in the Genocide Convention. As I am not involved in policy, I have to speak rather indirectly on these issues. My way to do that is to go as a witness, to see and let others see through what I see, so that it all comes back into the policy field in a more direct way.

▩ MACEOIN: Of all the things you are doing, which do you regard as your top priorities?

■ ROBINSON: I felt when I was elected that the most important task on this island was to extend the hand of friend-

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ship right across the board to the people of Northern Ireland, to have the beginnings of a real peace process. In consequence, although I have no role in intergovernmental talks or political discussions, that would be my very top priority. I have already been talking to you about the links, the little ways of encouraging and supporting that kind of thing, of being in touch. After that, my priority would be to reach out in that broader humanitarian way at every opportunity that arises. When I go later this morning to open a very small unemployment center at Donnycarney, it is to help the small, the marginalized, the vulnerable, by being interested in what they are doing. You know, by being present, by valuing for them their kind of activity. So, I suppose, there's plenty to do. □

Why she ran, how she won

It seems so fitting that Mary Robinson is president of Ireland that it is hard to recall what a long shot her election was when she began her campaign in April 1990. The Irish presidency is a ceremonial post, a reward given to an elder statesman for a job well done. Yet no other office in Ireland's parliamentary system is directly elected nationwide. So Robinson's campaign presented an opportunity to air national issues, positively, even powerfully.

Robinson's political career began in 1969. At the age of twenty-five, she was elected a senator, representing the constituency of Trinity College, Dublin, the first Catholic ever. She had been a standout at Trinity during her years as a student there and had returned as a law professor after practicing in the west of Ireland. As Reed Professor of Constitutional and Criminal Law, Robinson concentrated on equal-treatment and freedom issues. In many areas women in Ireland were still not afforded equal rights. They no longer had to resign their civil service posts when they married, but the laws retained a paternalistic bias and much of Irish legislation was aimed at maintaining an idealized family. Divorce and contraception were illegal. When membership in the European Union meant that Ireland must abide by such directives as equal pay for equal work, the government in Dublin resisted. Senator Robinson threatened to take it to the European Court. Though her commitment was to equality, she was labeled a radical and a feminist.

Robinson's background was not one that would normally lead to questioning the *status quo*. As a Bourke from Ballena, County Mayo, she is descended from Grace O'Malley de Burgho-Bourke, the queen of Connaught. In every generation, the Bourkes played their part as chieftains. Both her parents were doctors. But a year in America, at Harvard (1967-68), was a turning point for Robinson. She was greatly influenced by the activism she found there.

Mary Bourke's marriage to Nick Robinson, then a political cartoonist for the *Irish Times*, did not fit the mold either. He was a Protestant and their wedding was not the tribal celebration it would have been had she married within the clan. When she began her campaign for president, pollsters found that some voters thought she was Protestant because she was married to one. Such labeling was what she had set out to change.

The campaign was not easy. Dick Spring, head of the Labour party, with no more than 10 percent of the vote, had proposed Robinson's candidacy. But to add to her uphill struggle, Robinson had previously resigned from Labour. In 1987 she would not support the Anglo-Irish Agreement giving Dublin a consultative role in the North because, she argued, the Irish government had to espouse a true pluralism to show Northern Protestants that their right to religious freedom would be respected. The first woman to run for the presidency, Robinson had years of other controversial positions behind her. She had opposed the Catholic hierarchy on a number of issues, and she was attempting to win office in the most conservative country in Western Europe.

Yet when Robinson hit the campaign trail she found that she knew and understood her people in all their complexity, and that they knew her. Their concerns were immediate: continuing emigration of the young, community building, financial stability, and overcoming a sense of alienation. The people sought a forum as much as solutions. In the campaign, Robinson presented an image of elegance, yet one that did not contradict her commitment to social change.

She won by a margin of 86,000 votes, huge in Ireland. As she said on November 9, 1990, when she was declared victorious: "I was elected by men and women of all parties and none, by many with great moral courage who stepped from the faded flags of the Civil War and voted for a new Ireland. And above all by the women of Ireland, who, instead of rocking the cradle, rocked the system; and who came out massively to make their mark on the ballot paper, and on a new Ireland." She also gave an interpretation of what her victory against the odds meant: "To all those who have no voice or those whose voice is weak, I say, 'Take heart. There is hope. Look what you did in this election. You made history.' As president, I hope we will make history together." And they are.

MARY PAT KELLY

Mary Pat Kelly has written frequently for Commonweal *on Ireland and Eastern Europe.*

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A NATION OF VICTIMS?

Northern Ireland's two minorities

Brian Lennon

Last year, speaking to a group of Catholic high-school students in Omagh, a small country town in Northern Ireland, I put forward the view that the Irish conflict was not a colonial one. Rather it was rooted in the fact that there are two minorities in Ireland, one Catholic and one Protestant. At the end, one of the students asked when I was going to catch on: the conflict was clearly colonial. The British "robbed our land," he said. "Which land?" I asked. He lifted his right hand and pointed over his shoulder toward the fields outside the window. "Where is it?" I said. "Where is the field that you lost?" Again the hand waved, but no words came out. He couldn't name the field because the field was a myth in his head.

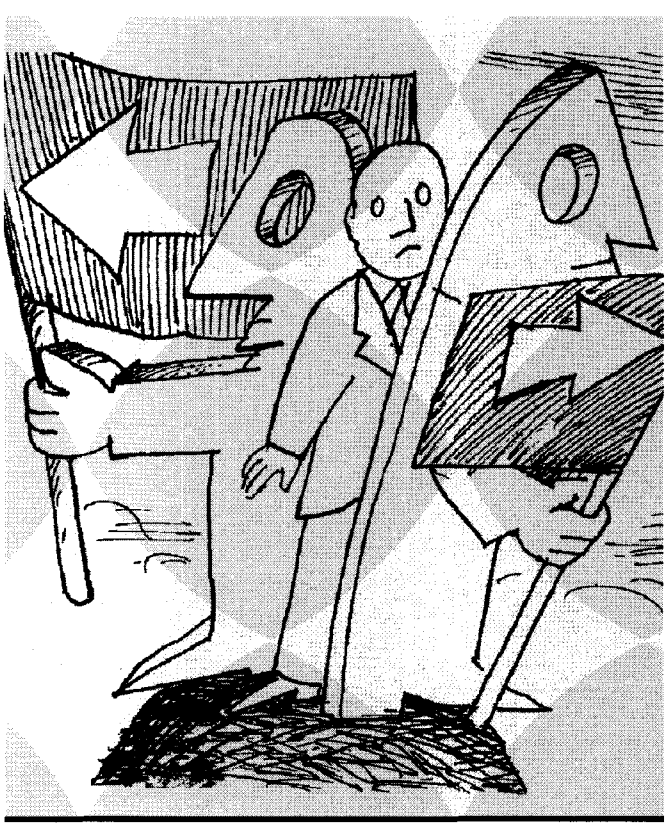
This is not to say that there is no field in reality. There may or may not be. Very often there is no way of finding out. That is one difference between our conflict and that of the Israelis and Palestinians: many Palestinians still have the keys of the homes from which their families were expelled in the late 1940s in what is now Israel. We Irish have no keys to our fields, because we are a mongrel race. We came to the island in successive groups: as Firbolgs, Celts, Normans—many of whom became Old English, as Elizabethan or Jacobite Planters. Many of us also changed our religious denomination: from Roman Catholic to Anglican or to one of the Protestant denominations, and sometimes back again. Right now, many of us have given up on religion altogether.

Finally, I asked my high-school friend, "When are you going to let go of that field?" Not having lost any fields myself, it was an easy question for me. For him it is difficult to answer. He sees himself as a victim and reads history to reinforce that image. And there are plenty of other issues to reinforce his sense of victimhood.

One of these is "justice." In Northern Ireland, it is a Nationalist word, so much so that one is unlikely to get agreement to use it in joint ecumenical statements. Nationalists have successfully presented themselves internationally as victims; for them, "justice" means righting their wrongs; this in turn means taking things away from Unionists.

Bloody Sunday, 1972, is an example. The British army shot and killed thirteen unarmed people in Derry. A government-appointed inquiry headed by Lord Chief Justice Widgery chose to admit as evidence only 15 out of 700 eye-witness accounts. He decided not to call Dr. Raymond McClean, who had been appointed by Cardinal Conway to attend the postmortems. McClean found that some of the victims had been shot by bullets traveling in a downward direction. Together with other evidence—all available to Widgery—this suggested that the soldiers of the First Parachute Regiment, who said they acted in response to gunfire, were in fact correct: another British unit was also firing into the crowd.

In his report, Widgery implied that some of those killed had been handling weapons, a claim later denied by British Prime Minister John Major. Widgery accepted the statements of the soldiers, all of whom claimed to have been firing at



Brian Lennon, S.J., *a member of the Portadown Jesuit Community, does community, economic, and ecumenical work in Northern Ireland. Currently a visiting fellow at Georgetown Theological Center in Washington, D.C., he is the author of* After the Ceasefires: Catholics and the Future of Northern Ireland *(Dublin, Columba Press).*

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bombers or snipers. None of the soldiers was ever charged and their commander was awarded an Order of the British Empire later that year. The Widgery inquiry and the persistent refusal since of successive British governments to allow a new investigation confirmed the belief of many Nationalists that due process in a British system of justice is not possible.

In this case Nationalist perceptions of injustice are accurate. But many Nationalists remain blind to injustices carried out against others by members of their own community. Recipients of Sinn Fein e-mail get reams on British and Unionist injustices, but when it comes to the IRA they are told only about successful or unsuccessful "operations" against British occupation forces, as if the IRA were made up of deft hospital surgeons.

For their part, Unionists are incensed at all the attention given to Bloody Sunday. They too have been victims. Of the 3,000 people killed since 1968, over 60 percent died at the hands of Nationalist paramilitaries. In a population of about 1 million Unionists, there is hardly a family that has not suffered a bereavement. So Unionists respond to Bloody Sunday by asking: Why do people make so much fuss about what may have been an "overreaction" by the British army on one occasion, and ignore the long line of IRA atrocities?

Furthermore, many Unionists fear the Catholic church. They see it as a monolithic structure dedicated to overthrowing Protestantism. It took me many years of dialogue to understand this perception. I finally began to understand it through an image: Protestant churches tend to be small and numerous. Catholic churches are large. When Protestants come out of a Sunday service, they do not notice the other small Protestant groups. Instead they see the very large Catholic church and the great numbers who worship there. They don't know what goes on inside, because they won't go in to find out. They know that the IRA is made up of Catholics, not Protestants. They suspect that Catholics do what their priests tell them.

Finally, Unionists want to be part of the U.K.—that is what defines them. They need the U.K. government to protect them from the IRA. At the same time, they resent the dependent position in which this leaves them.

Over the past 300 years, Protestants in Ireland as a whole have gradually lost power, status, and prestige. They have been moving geographically toward the northeast. And next to the northeast is the Irish Sea. In a very real sense, the Unionist community has its back to the water. That is what I mean when I say that Unionists as well as Nationalists are a minority. Just as the Nationalists are a minority within Northern Ireland, so the Unionists are a minority within Ireland as a whole. Each side has good reasons for its sense of victimhood.

It should be relatively easy for North Americans to relate to minority problems—with all the civil rights issues these raise—but in the Irish case the difficulty is compounded by nationalism. Nationalism can act as a carrier of identity. But the model of an independent nation state is highly problematic

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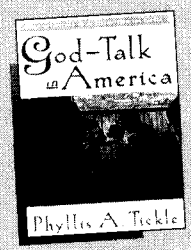

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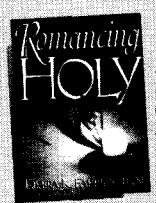

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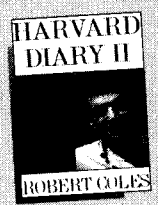

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in the context of two opposed minorities.

In the Irish case, each group is strong enough to be able to withstand the other. A solution that is either exclusively British or exclusively Irish cannot work, because the other side has the power to veto it.

In Northern Ireland we have yet to come up with an alternative to the traditional nation state. We have found some of the ingredients: any future government must involve players from both sides; we need a bill of rights (the U.K. has no written constitution); we need an ethos of reconciliation involving both forgiveness and apology; we need new structures of policing and an on-the-ground commitment to fair employment; we need North-South cooperative bodies in areas like tourism that will market the island as a whole for the economic benefit of all.

These policy details do not begin to provide an overarching myth. "America" is a myth for which people will kill and die. I am not discussing the morality of that fact, but simply using it to show the strength—despite all the strains—of the American myth. What could constitute a parallel in the Irish context?

In most countries the unifying myth emerged from a historical struggle for independence. In our case the struggle for independence was against each other. While we have a common language, English (although a minority speak Gaelic out of commitment), it is not something people have had to struggle over in this century; and religion, despite our common Christianity, is still only a means of unity within each minority.

What then could be the basis of a new myth? What common struggle could bind us together? Perhaps the answer is the effort involved to build a peaceful society that respects legitimate diversity. What was fascinating during the last ceasefire was the extent to which Nationalists and Unionists wanted to meet each other, to find out about the other side's life and values, to celebrate what they have in common.

If language and religion are unlikely to be our main identity carriers, we are left with the task of forging a new constitution to play this role. And that is my hope: that shortly we will together face the task of constitution building for a new kind of nation state: one with two minorities linked to both Britain and the Republic of Ireland within the context of the European Union.

Our immediate need, however, is an end to violence. The last IRA ceasefire, in August 1994, was a very difficult move for Republicans. Traditionally their analysis has been that the conflict was a colonial one and the solution was to remove the British through violence. Their decision to end violence suggested they were moving toward a new analysis. The British failed to respond adequately to their initiative, in part because they were suspicious of IRA intentions. That was a pity. While no one should be naive about the IRA, if it offers an end to violence (even if this does not include handing over weapons, or ending punishment beatings), the IRA should be taken at its word: if it breaks its word it will be even more isolated politically—provided the British government does not continue to mishandle issues such as Bloody Sunday. In December, the British failed once again to respond to an IRA offer of a ceasefire, mediated by John Hume, M.P., head of the Social Democratic and Labour Party. It is critical that after the coming election the new British government get back into the driver's seat and take the initiative in seeking another ceasefire.

The key change of the past fifteen years is that the British and Irish governments have agreed on the double minority analysis and on the need for reconciliation. (The Preamble to the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement is full of aspirations toward reconciliation.) While there are still frequent difficulties between the two governments, the Republic is now consulted on major issues by the British government. This has set a framework that limits the conflict.

I hope my high-school friend from Omagh gives up his dream about his field. But I hope he will be able to replace it with a better one: to rear his children in peace and harmony with his Protestant neighbors whose ancestors came to the island before colonists came to America. We have no future if we keep on killing each other. Our only future lies together. And for that we need new myths. □

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Celia Wren

THEY THINK, ERGO, THEY SUFFER

Chekhov's 'Three Sisters'

The Prozorov sisters' much desired and eternally thwarted journey to Moscow gleams through Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters* like Zeno's arrow in reverse: as time goes by, the distance between the sisters and their dream city increases, though in act 1 they appear to be on the verge of arriving, and though they would arrive if it were possible to close a gap with pure longing.

Even if they did get to Moscow, though, chances are that Olga, Masha, and Irina would still be thinking too much. Thinking too much causes much unhappiness in this play, which Chekhov wrote in 1901. In a moment of inspiration, early in act 1, Irina's suitor, Baron Tuzenbach, rebukes the sisters' bad habit of asking what it all means: "What does it mean?....It's snowing outside—what does that mean?" By the end of the play, though, he is as bad as all the rest. Everyone is thinking—about the purpose of life, about ambitions and careers, about society's future, about why birds fly south—and because they think, they feel perpetually unsatisfied.

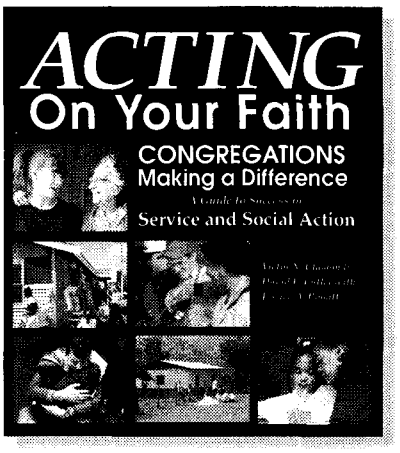
Thought may also be getting in the way of the Roundabout Theater's production of *Three Sisters*, which despite several winning performances and numerous comic moments seems a little unrooted, as if everyone had thought a great deal about the nuances of Chekhov without ever feeling at ease with his characters. Using an unobtrusive translation by the gifted playwright Lanford Wilson, director Scott Elliott has adopted a straightforward, naturalistic approach that takes advantage of the script's comic potential. Overall, his distinguished actors execute their roles with grace, but the energy level never feels terribly high—something of a problem in a play that is three-and-a-half-hours long.

Though the directorial touches are more subtle here than in director Elliott's other current Broadway production, *Present Laughter*, there are some discreetly inspired moments, such as when the bizarre, ill-tempered Captain Solyony (Billy Crudup), seated at the back of the stage, rudely polishes his silverware on his dinner napkin while his hostess looks on. And if the comings and goings of the characters, the confessions and the *non sequiturs*, have a hint of staginess, that is certainly a problem that could seem almost inherent to Chekhov.

A handsome but not extravagant set designed by Derek McLane succeeds in emphasizing the scenes and personalities that Chekhov keeps off the stage. For example, the row of French windows in the Prozorovs' dining room, in acts 1 and 2, gives a nice symmetry to the production's beginning and end. In act 2 a frosty moonlight slants through the panes, and when Irina stands looking out at the carnival revelers who have been turned away from the house, she really does seem separated from the gaiety of life.

By contrast, act 4 is set in the garden just outside these same windows. We can see through them to the dining room where Andrei Prozorov's shrewish wife Natalya (Calista Flockhart) is crowing over her children. The windows' transparency makes it all the more noticeable at this point that we do not see Natalya's visiting lover Protopopov, whom Chekhov chose to make an invisible, though sinister, presence throughout the play.

More practically, McLane's set gives the characters room to pace about as they ponder the meaning of existence. After all, this production's greatest claim to fame is its cast of eminent actors, including several refugees from Hollywood. Unfortunately, some of the performances are a little disappointing. Amy Irving cre-



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ates a measured and dignified portrait of Olga, her acceptance of suffering seeming to improve her immaculate posture. Jeanne Tripplehorn has seductive moments as the flaky Masha. But Lili Taylor is nothing short of disastrous as the youngest sister, Irina: Taylor delivers all her lines in the same breathy tone, leaning forward from the waist in a way that makes her delivery even more strained and unbelievable.

Among the supporting characters, Jerry Stiller is hilariously deadpan as the decaying doctor Chebutykin. Eric Stoltz and David Marshall Grant give amusing but curiously superficial depictions of the Baron and of Masha's pompous schoolmaster husband Kulygin.

Two of the best performances extend the play's atmosphere of sadness and disillusionment beyond the eponymous sisters. Paul Giamatti's excellent comic timing in the role of Andrei complements the character's more reflective moments, such as when he sits in his darkened living room passing his finger through a candle flame.

And David Strathairn is truly moving as the disappointed dreamer Vershinin, the Battery Commander whose love for Masha cannot tarnish his gallant behavior toward his family. Strathairn has perfect stage presence, and his smallest movements—his cautious, restless glances, his soldierly carriage, his slightly uneasy workings of the hands—suggest great passion and pain held in check by impeccable manners.

In a way, Vershinin becomes the play's saddest figure because he is such an idealist, and has such naive faith in an idea of mystical progress. As he says in act 4 (according to an older translation than Wilson's): "Life is hard. It seems to many of us blank and hopeless; but yet we must admit that it goes on getting clearer and easier, and it looks as though the time were not far off when it will be full of happiness."

It was probably this kind of philosophical strain, running through the play, that gave another New York director, Richard Schechner, the idea for a recent experimental version that situated each act at a different point in Russian history, with matching performance style (act 1 set in 1901 *à la* Stanislavsky, act 2 in the first years of the Communist state with the mannerisms of biomechanics, act 3 as a political critique set in a 1950's labor camp, and act 4 as a postmodern meditation on the end of the Soviet Union). As this intriguing concept suggests, visions of a perfect society and a better future haunt *Three Sisters*, a little as the specter of Moscow does.

Fortunately, Chekhov never reduces his characters to spokespersons for ideas. Olga, Masha, Irina, and friends are more than the sum of their circumstances. That is why if, one day, the act 4 curtain rose on a domicile miraculously transferred to Moscow, the members of the Prozorov household would still be themselves. And they would still be thinking. □

Celia Wren *is a frequent contributor to* Commonweal.

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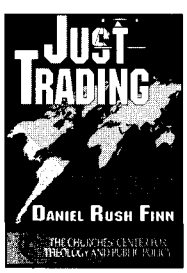

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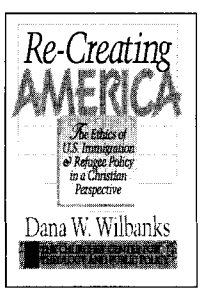

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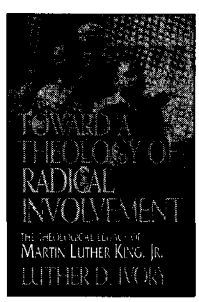

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Among Catholics, it's crisis all over

R. Scott Appleby

Books discussed in this essay

Catholics in Crisis: An American Parish Fights for Its Soul
Jim Naughton
Addison-Wesley, $24, 273 pp.

What God Allows: The Crisis of Faith and Conscience in One Catholic Church
Ivor Shapiro
Doubleday, $23.95, 307 pp.

The Good Enough Catholic: A Guide for the Perplexed
Paul Wilkes
Ballantine, $25, 354 pp.

By now the litany should be familiar to even the casual reader of this magazine. The U. S. Catholic church faces: a serious personnel shortage and low morale among the waning number of active priests; a mounting financial burden as clergy and women religious age and retire; a growing number of priestless parishes; a generation of professionally educated lay ministers seeking adequate financial and professional support; dissent from its theologians and infighting among its pastoral leaders; indifference toward or ignorance of its teachings among young baptized Catholics; and widespread defiance of its sexual ethics among the 45 million Catholics who attend Mass at least once a month. The American Catholic church of the 1990s is a *community in crisis*.

So say the pollsters, pundits, and professors (with the singular exception of Andrew Greeley) who ponder national survey data and peruse one another's columns. For evidence of debilitating polarization they point to the Catholic culture wars waged by organizations like Call to Action, CORPUS, and the Women's Ordination Conference on the left, and Opus Dei, the Catholic League, and Catholics United for the Faith on the right. Shaped by their relatively narrow constituencies, these organizations and the movements they represent command attention because they sense and seize the opportunity for radical change afforded by a historical period in which everything Catholic seems to be up for grabs. They would shove the American church in the direction of complete fidelity to the magisterium or, conversely, toward ever greater degrees of separation from the Vatican.

But how does the crisis motif play in the parish? Whatever their opinion about the issues dividing the church, the vast majority of American Catholics tend to think of themselves as members of a parish rather than of a movement. How do the so-called Catholic culture wars influence the perceptions and experiences of the local faith community?

The books under consideration here take up this important question. Jim Naughton, senior editor at *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and a former reporter for the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, provides a case study of Holy Trinity Parish in Washington, D.C.—white, Jesuit-run, upper-middle class, famously progressive. Ivor Shapiro, a journalist who lives in Toronto, profiles Saint Paul's Church in Kenmore, New York—white, diocesan-run, working class, a "typical" post-Vatican II parish.

Both journalists include the word "crisis" in their titles, report on the period from 1992 to 1994 (with Shapiro focusing on the liturgical year of 1993), and include an epilogue on developments at the parish in question during 1995. Both specialize in narration, provide breezy summaries of the relevant historical and theological background, and offer analysis that is solid and insightful if not always penetrating. They do little more than confirm much of the conventional wisdom about the major events and trends of postconciliar American Catholicism—pointing, for example, to the unmistakably crucial role that the ill-fated reception of *Humanae vitae* played in creating a climate of popular dissent from "unreasonable" papal and episcopal teaching. But these studies enrich the literature by shifting the focus from the university, chancery, and seminary to the primary communal site for the People of God, the local parish.

Paul Wilkes, the author of several previous portraits of American religious life, does not use the word "crisis" in his title. But the format of his "guide for the perplexed"—part progressive catechism, part interpretive history, part New Age-ish psychospiritual therapy—speaks volumes about the parlous state of Catholic truth-tellers and truth-seekers alike. Motivated by compassion for those gentle souls who would return or turn to the church were it not so hard-hearted, Wilkes sets himself up as a kind of friendly one-man magisterium, espousing his own personal solutions to complex, controverted questions, ignoring inconvenient historical or doctrinal claims against his assertions, and passing off tendentious readings of Vatican II as if they were matters of unshakable consensus. (The fact that I agree with much of what he says does not make his method palatable.)

Apparently Wilkes has decided that the church needs a well-informed and pastorally sensitive layman like himself to step in and settle matters, the bishops having failed to develop popular and compelling interpretations of Scripture, moral theology, and canon law. Thus he

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simply substitutes his own, presumably wiser, sensibilities, convictions, and opinions for theirs. "No human law, no public or private sin—nothing can prevent you from receiving the Eucharist if you earnestly desire this communion with God," he assures those who might wonder whether they need to examine their conscience or believe anything particular about the Real Presence before receiving the sacrament. Don't bother: the "Good Enough Catholic" (a conceit taken from Bruno Bettleheim's *The Good Enough Parent*) need not attempt to become a spiritual paragon or saint; nor, apparently, need she follow the counsels of perfection, or even worry much about the scruples of a rightly formed conscience. Remember, Wilkes consoles, if you intend to be better, well, you already *are* better.

His guide to the perplexed and put-upon, peppered with quotes from the forty lay Catholics he interviewed (apparently meant to represent a contemporary *sensus fidelium*), seems predicated upon the assumption that, if one simply ignores the other side of the argument, those disagreeable folks will go away, and "good enough" liberals will proceed to realize the promise of Vatican II. In that imagined post-crisis Catholic world, for example, Catholics will understand sex outside of marriage to be "an act of human intimacy—a value in itself," but one requiring the use of some form of birth control, on both practical and moral terms. *Voilà*!—no controversy!

Back in the messy, real, and contested world of bishops and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Naughton and Shapiro build their narratives around the lives of parishioners chosen, it seems, from central casting, '90s version: the tortured priest who finally accepts his sexual identity, takes a male lover, and leaves the priesthood and parish far behind; the lay champion of papal authority who appoints himself guardian of orthodoxy and alienates his less zealous colleagues (that is, all of them); the dedicated and talented RCIA or adult education director who grows frustrated with foot-dragging pastors, lay inquisitors, or her own personal doubts; the divorced Catholics who want to remarry in the church but find the annulment process insulting, nonsensical, or punitive; the young parents ambivalent about the church's moral stance but intent on raising their children on "the traditional stories."

Naughton, a member of Holy Trinity Parish during the unfolding of the events he recounts, opens his story in the spring of 1992 with a description of "The Standing," a protest against the church's refusal to ordain women. Layman Ray McGovern, a former C.I.A. official, recognized "the voice of the oppressor" in John Paul II's order to cease discussion of women's ordination; when a handful of sympathetic fellow parishioners joined McGovern in his practice of standing throughout the 9:15 Sunday Mass, "The Standing" became a *cause célèbre* and eventually made the national news. Naughton situates the protest in the context of "a growing network of organizations [that] have sprung up to contest teachings that many Catholics believe are theologically suspect, psychologically harmful, and detrimental to the vitality of the church."

Holy Trinity is the high-profile home of members of the Women's Ordination Conference, CORPUS, and Call to Action, among other such progressive organizations. Boasting a full-time director of liturgy, a full-time director of music, several part-time choir directors, and a full-time liturgical aide, the parish has been, for many, a model of lay participation and leadership. Volunteer teams work with the worship committee to plan every Mass; lay people decorate the sanctuary, read from the Scriptures, give Communion, and occasionally preach. Since Vatican II the size of the parish has grown fivefold, to 4,400 households; parishioners come from as far away as forty-five miles. In 1992 there were 700 students enrolled in the Sunday morning CCD program, and burgeoning programs in adult education, Jesuit spirituality, and social outreach.

To many observers, Holy Trinity is the model of what a contemporary parish

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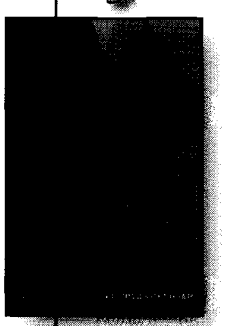

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should be: theologically sophisticated, spiritually enriching, and liturgically vibrant. The affluent community's record of commitment to the preferential option for the poor is perhaps more ambiguous, given a highly publicized controversy over a former pastor's refusal to support a proposed center for the homeless, and lukewarm support for a sister church in El Salvador. Nonetheless, it has earned a reputation as a place where alienated Catholics take their first steps back into the church, and as a parish of last resort for those who find Catholic teaching on sex roles and sexual ethics oppressive.

For officials of the Archdiocese of Washington, however, Holy Trinity was a headache. "For at the core of its success lies a willingness to trust the spiritual integrity and moral judgment of its parishioners," Naughton writes. "And this, the archdiocese believes, is sometimes done at the expense of Catholic doctrine." Conservatives, perhaps envious of and frustrated by its success, branded the Holy Trinity approach "R. C. Lite."

The main character of *Catholics in Crisis* is Father Jim Maier, the pastor whose life and ministry Naughton portrays as a constant struggle to reconcile opposing forces—within himself and within his parish. Maier was beset not by critics from Opus Dei or CUF, but by proponents of two countervailing tendencies within progressive American Catholicism. The "confrontationalists," as Naughton describes them, wanted to challenge Roman authority and patriarchy, experiment with new liturgical forms, and create smaller new communities to replace or supplement traditional parishes. "Accommodationists," on the other hand, advocated a patient and discreet engagement with church authorities on a narrower range of issues, including birth control, divorce and remarriage, priestly celibacy and women's ordination. Despite their discomfort with particular teachings, accommodationists believe that the church needs gradual reform rather than radical restructuring.

"The Standing" threatened to disrupt the delicate balance between these factions by forcing the hand of Cardinal James Hickey. Father Maier, caught in the throes of a personal crisis and eagerly anticipating the approaching end of his pastorate at Holy Trinity, was deeply troubled by the thought of Hickey bringing in an authoritarian successor, perhaps not a Jesuit, who would stifle the spirit of the parish. Yet Maier could not bring himself to end the protest by pastoral fiat, for he rightly recognized "The Standing" to be an expression of principled dissent. And in 1968, Holy Trinity had claimed as its own the American Catholic legacy of principled dissent when its former pastor, Tom Gavigan, had publicly opposed *Humanae vitae* and been deprived of his right to hear confessions.

Thereafter, the Jesuits of Holy Trinity, like many pastors across the nation, effected what Naughton calls "the great accommodation" by continuing to minister to the faithful who disobeyed the

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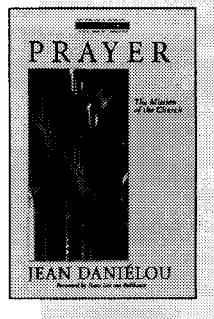
Jean Daniélou
FOREWORD BY HANS URS VON BALTHASAR



This book is especially important as a guide to the practice of prayer and contemplative worship. Daniélou shows how prayer is the attunement of our minds and hearts to the triune God in whom we live and move and have our being. The mission of the Church is to lead humanity in the Spirit through the Word incarnate to the Father." — MATTHEW L. LAMB

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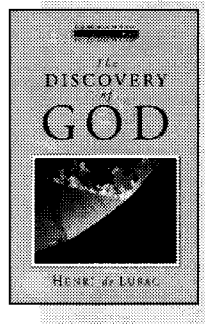

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church on birth control and other sexual matters. They did so by invoking the priority of conscience, a central but ambiguous tenet of the faith that can be interpreted, in the spirit of Wilkes's *Good Enough Catholic*, to justify a wide range of moral practices.

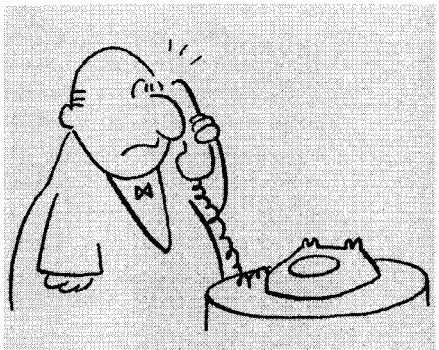
The maturing discipline of pastoral theology also came in handy for those who sought to reconcile hard teaching and soft practice, for it allowed a certain leeway—in the form of the pastor's prudential judgment—in the application of doctrinal and ethical norms to concrete situations. Originally, the rationale for priestly connivance—the practice of looking the other way when one knew that the couple was living together without benefit of marriage, or using artificial birth control—held that people were more likely to change their opinions and behaviors if they were not driven away but remained as members of a supportive faith community.

What God Allows suggests that nothing of the kind happened. Instead, lay Catholics extended their newfound independence of judgment beyond the realm of private sexual behavior to once taken-for-granted indices of Catholic loyalty like regular Mass attendance and support for the parochial school. For the working-class parishioners of Saint Paul's outside Buffalo, New York, the gulf between official Catholic teaching and the life of the Catholic parish has only widened in the years since *Humanae vitae*. Thus the "Crisis of Faith and Conscience" in Shapiro's subtitle refers to the increasing difficulty experienced by some laity, priests, and religious in espousing, much less enforcing, the doctrinal and moral positions handed down by Pope John Paul II.

For Judy Nice, director of adult sacraments at Saint Paul's, the last straw was a scathing note from a recalcitrant RCIA catechist, complaining that she was soft-pedaling the objective moral teaching of the church and feeding her spiritual lambs "a Women's Spirit/Women's Church/New Age/Feminist diet." Nice believes she was feeding them compassion, sensitivity, respect for all human beings, love of Jesus and the Scriptures, and a thirst for justice; but after finding her words repeatedly interpreted along ideological lines by the lay guardians of orthodoxy, and finding insufficient support from her already overburdened pastor, she resigned the job she loved.

Shapiro periodically interrupts his engaging account of the lived faith at Saint Paul's with pointed excerpts from Pope John Paul II's 1993 encyclical, *Veritatis splendor*, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, or some other recent official statement of the church's moral teaching. Dropped into the text like lead weights, these excerpts are a heavy-handed but effective device for contrasting the ambiguous, complex, plural, and shifting mores and experiences of the people with the unambiguous, univocal, tightly reasoned, stylistically aloof, and absolutist pronouncements of the Vatican. Rather than suggest connections or points of possible *rapprochement* between these two worlds, however, Shapiro is content, in a kind of postmoderny way, to let the disjunction have its benumbing or puzzling effect.

Benumbed and puzzled, one may nonetheless garner at least two impressions about the white American Catholic parish of the 1990s. If these books are any indication, it has nary a clue what to do with gifted lay women, who enjoy neither the status nor the protection of the ordained priesthood, but who are called upon increasingly to play the role of mediator between competing factions within the parish and to organize and lead whatever spiritual enrichment or social outreach programs the parish offers. Despite the predictable charges that they foment "radical feminism" and watered-down catechesis, the Judy Nices of the Catholic world seem its best hope for preserving continuity, at the parish level, with the historic Christian practices of hospitality, personal and communal prayer, theological education, and spiritual formation.



"You're not supposed to dial 911 just because of a vague sense of foreboding."

By the early 1990s there were more lay people in graduate theology programs than there were young men studying for the priesthood, and most of those lay students were women. Although these two sets of Catholic ministers will likely be working side by side in the coming years, the church has done little to introduce them to one another during their years of formal training, and even less to break open and reshape clerical culture in such a way as to make room for and welcome such collaboration with lay women as the will of God and a grace to the church.

That is a matter of regret shading into outrage, for a second lesson of these pulse-taking volumes is that there is no substitute for a vital institutional church at the local level, a communal presence of Christ that is identifiably Catholic in form and content. In telling the story of Catholics as they struggle individually and communally to reconcile their own moral perceptions with the teachings of their church, Naughton and Shapiro—and, in a different way, Wilkes—take note of the attrition, the absences after a season of uncooperation, the falling away of commitment as the search for common ground becomes merely a grind. In the absence of a vigorous and honest process of rethinking the relationship between different types of pastoral leaders, there can be little hope of providing guidance for ordinary Catholics in crisis. The pastoral reality will remain, as Naughton puts it, "a circumscribed combat in which each camp schemes to subdue the other while not unduly damaging the church in the process." Not Good Enough. □

R. Scott Appleby *is associate professor of history and director of the Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism at the University of Notre Dame.*

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Back to the future

Michael O. Garvey

When he is not catechizing as a professor of theology at the John Paul II Institute in Washington, D.C., or editing the North American volume of the theological journal *Communio*, David L. Schindler is storing up treasure for himself in the Kingdom of God, and probably costing the Eerdmans Publishing Company a bundle, by bringing out an invaluable new series of great Catholic books dedicated to "retrieval and renewal in Catholic thought."

Schindler's list—to get that irresistible usage over with—consists mainly of the European theologians and philosophers from the middle of our century who midwived Vatican II, thinkers whose writings are, in a manner that seems sadly exotic in 1997, permeated and sustained by the sacramental life of the Catholic church. What these thinkers had in common, according to the series introduction, was "the double conviction that theology had to speak to the present situation, and that the condition for doing so faithfully lay in a recovery of the church's past. In other words, they saw clearly that the first step in what later came to be known as *aggiornamento* had to be *ressourcement*—a rediscovery of the riches of the whole of the church's two-thousand-year tradition." The introduction promises that future offerings of the series will include "works in theology, philosophy, history, literature, and the arts which give renewed expression to an authentic Catholic sensibility."

Eerdmans isn't exactly an ultramontane outfit, and Mother Angelica's TV network hasn't yet begun to advertise the Ressourcement series, but because names like Schindler and Ratzinger are involved, the undertaking is likely to be regarded (and dismissed) by many otherwise openminded people as a narrowly partisan traditionalist project. And that's too bad, because whatever its provenance, this publication is a marvelous moment for the "Church Literate" and provides an admirable alternative to the methodological agnosticism that makes so much contemporary theology so dull to read. The great hillbilly Thomist, Flannery O'Connor, once famously remarked during what seemed to her a fatuous discussion of eucharistic symbolism, "If it's only a symbol, I say to hell with it." This is her kind of series.

Books discussed in this essay

Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Theological Style
Angelo Scola
Eerdmans, $25, 111 pp.

"In the Beginning": A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall
Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger
Eerdmans, $13, 100 pp.

Letters from Lake Como: Explorations in Technology and the Human Race
Romano Guardini
Eerdmans, $10, 115 pp.

Mysterium Paschale
Hans Urs von Balthasar
Eerdmans, $25, 297 pp.

Prayer: The Mission of the Church
Jean Daniélou
Eerdmans, $15, 124 pp.

The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma
Maurice Blondel
Eerdmans, $19, 301 pp.

That isn't to say that Maurice Blondel's dense philosophical reflections on the Modernist crisis or Angelo Scola's exhaustive analysis of von Balthasar's theological method will have excited readers in the thousands sporadically leaping up from their Barcaloungers and bellowing "yesss!" But all of these works emphasize and deploy Blondel's conclusion that "something in the church escapes scientific examination; and it is the church which, without rejecting or neglecting the contributions of exegesis and of history, nevertheless controls them, because in the very tradition which constitutes her, she possesses another means of knowing her author, of participating in his life, of linking facts to dogma, and of justifying both the capital and the interest of her teaching."

It seems that few Catholic theologians working nowadays would directly disagree with Blondel there, but when it comes to "justifying both the capital and the interest" of church teaching, many of them—and nearly all of those with tenure—seem to become bashful, tongue-tied, or crankily defensive about triumphalism. A few days after the excommunication of the Sri Lankan theologian Tissa Balasuriya, a justifiably troubled editorialist writing in the London *Tablet* asked rhetorically, "Are we back to the methods and content of pre-conciliar theology?" One need not believe that Father Balasuriya is a heretic, nor applaud all the operations and tactics of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, nor long for the restoration of the Papal States and the Tridentine Mass and the churching of women and the starching of wimples to reply, "I sure hope so."

I don't for a single minute doubt that

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preconciliar church administration was every bit as clumsy and occasionally uncharitable as postconciliar church administration has been. But these works certainly indicate that pre-conciliar theology, whatever all those censorious church administrators might have thought about it, was not bad at all, and was at the very least capable of producing arguments worth having.

In a magnificent essay adapted for *Commonweal* a year or so ago, Luke Timothy Johnson lamented the current "academic captivity of the church" and suggested that theologically imprisoned believers might begin to make their journey out of bondage by simply acknowledging "that whatever the church's discourse is, it should not be the same as the academy's, nor should it be subject to the same rules or the same criteria of validity." This recommendation particularly infuriates theologians who have done quite well by the academy, but it powerfully appeals to ordinary churchgoing nonacademic readers who believe, as Jean Daniélou does, that "the tragedy of the modern world is that it no longer occupies itself with God."

Daniélou seeks to remedy that situation by providing the modern world with, ahem, saints. "A saint," he writes, "is someone who has a sense of God's grandeur, who has found joy in God, and who, filled with this love, desires to communicate it and share it, just as one would desire to speak of whatever it is that fills one's heart. If we do not speak enough about God, it is because our hearts are not sufficiently filled with him. A heart filled with God speaks of God without effort, whereas it often takes effort because our hearts are not sufficiently enflamed....Obviously, there is no need to wait until our hearts are completely filled with God in order to speak of him, because we would end up waiting indefinitely." The deceptively plain style, like that of Daniélou's meditations on the Our Father, or of his essay on "The Evangelical Spirit of Humility," exemplifies a sort of discourse that owes a great deal more to the elders of the desert than to the middle-agesters of the Modern Language Association.

It will be (and has been) objected that to celebrate that difference too much is to advocate a boorish restoration of some illusory golden age—a disgruntled, sectarian retreat from the challenges and possibilities of modernity. But I suspect that most dissenters from what Schindler, Stanley Hauerwas, Michael Baxter, and others might call the Americanist Magisterium have an even more ambitious project in mind. They want to subvert modernity altogether. Such dissenters seem to share with, for instance, Romano Guardini, a profound disapproval of "a human attitude that no longer feels itself tied by living human unity and its organic compass and that regards as petty and narrow the limitation in which an earlier time found supreme fulfillment, wisdom, beauty, a well-rounded fullness of life." Reborn in this attitude, and "now freed from every organic link, the will can set its own goals, and by controlling natural forces rationally it can make the execution of these goals compulsory. Living people fall victim to this ineluctability. They are given up to the caprice of their own goals, which have no organic relation." It would be a good thing if a few more of us seemed to be alarmed by what seemed to alarm Guardini.

Nevertheless, those of us who are dissatisfied, confused, bored, and annoyed by the protocols of contemporary academic theology will hardly find in these recently "retrieved" thinkers the easy pieties and spurious magisterial reassurances we're sometimes accused of seeking. Not only can these works become every bit as dense as a deconstructionist's daydream, they can also be downright scary, but that's the Incarnation for you. Hans Urs von Balthasar's unsettling reflections on the death of the Lord—the dead Messiah's ultimate solidarity with all the dead—are memorably unflinching in their consideration of the obliterated humanity of the entombed Jesus: "In the same way that, upon earth, he was in solidarity with the living, so, in the tomb, he is in solidarity with the dead. One must allow to this 'solidarity' an amplitude and an ambiguity, even, which seem

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precisely to exclude a communication on his part as subject. Each human being lies in his own tomb. And with this condition, seen here from the viewpoint of the separated body, Jesus is at first truly solitary." Such reflections call to mind Gerard Hopkins's lines: "O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall/Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap/ May who ne'er hung there."

At least since 1981, when he assumed his present responsibilities in the Vatican bureaucracy, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger has been much more widely known for his administration of harsh ecclesial discipline than for his theology. Readers willing to leave aside the intriguing but not terribly promising question of whether or not he has deserved this somewhat diminished reputation will be rewarded by his four homilies on the creation narratives in the book of Genesis. Rejecting the reductionist positions of literalists and rationalists alike, his reflections on the orientation of creation toward worship and on the implications of humankind's having been made in the image of God are concluded by an essay on "The Consequences of Faith in Creation." In it, an argument for the inseparability of the doctrines of creation and redemption becomes an invitation "to accept mystery as the center of reality, that is to say, to accept love, creation as love, and to make that love the foundation of one's life." It's not terribly difficult to imagine the same author denouncing the sort of essay most *Commonweal* readers could write on "The Consequences of Faith in Creation for the Administration of the Catholic Church," but surely our church would be far better served than she is now if even our most strenuous disagreements could be wrangled out not on the world's terms but on our own, and by our own lights and in a language drawn from and replenished by our own tradition. If we can't manage to discover and revere the Lord in our own peculiar household, how can we hope to tell the neighbors about him?

Ezra Pound thought that just as music became less music the further it departed from the dance, poetry became less poetry the further it departed from music. Surely theology becomes less theology the further it departs from prayer. Theologians who aren't preoccupied by prayer are like literary critics who aren't preoccupied by literature. Contemporary theology, no less than contemporary literary criticism, is handicapped by surprising numbers of such scholars. The Ressourcement series recalls a theology that tends toward prayer and reminds us that among the countless blessings we enjoy in our communion is a wonderful way to talk in and about and to the modern world. We should be grateful for the reminder, and we should set about relearning how to talk that way. The world needs it as badly as we do. □

Michael O. Garvey *is the author of* Finding Fault *(Thomas More Press).*

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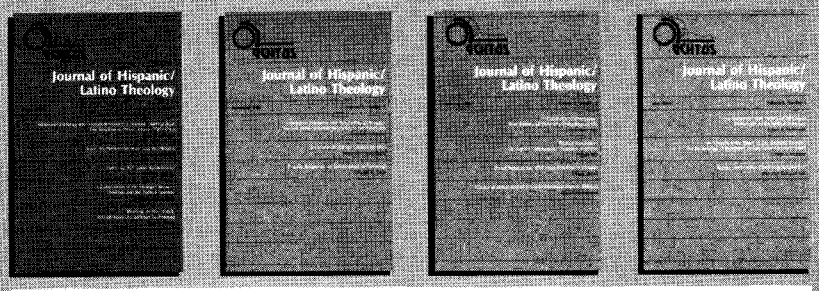

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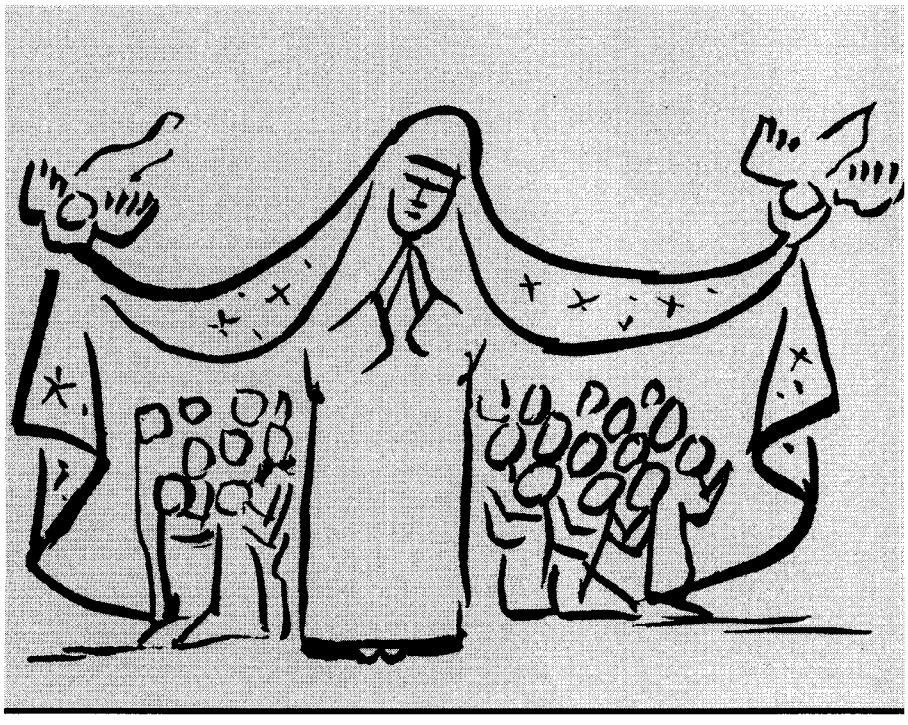
She came, she saw, she conquered

Goddess of the Americas
Writings on the Virgin of Guadalupe
Edited by Ana Castillo
Riverhead Books, $23.95, 231 pp.

Robert Orsi

"Am I not your Mother?" she asked him in his language, Nahuatl. "Are you not in the folds of my mantle, in the crossing of my arms?" The Virgin of Guadalupe appeared first in 1531 to a man named Cuauhtlatóhuac—He Who Speaks Like an Eagle—but known since his baptism as Juan Diego, on the hill of Tepeyacac, where the mother-goddess Tonantzin had been worshiped by his people. She appears today on bolo ties, playing cards, tattooed on the skins of *cholos* in East L.A. and South Phoenix, on belts, pillows, towels, cigar boxes, lampshades, "among horns honking, ambulances running, children crying, all the people groaning and dancing and making love," in the struggles of farm workers, in the places of the sick and dying, carved in soup bones, and in ravines on the border between Mexico and the United States, helping her people make the crossing north in the middle of the night by distracting the border patrols. She is—in a litany taken from this volume—Tequatlanopeuh (She Whose Origins Were in the Rocky Summit), Tlecuauhtlaupeuh (She Who Comes Flying from the Light Like an Eagle of Fire), Tequantlaxopeuh (She Who Banishes Those That Ate Us), Coatlaxopeuh (She Who Crushed the Serpent's Head), Mother of Mexico, Mother of Orphans, Our Lady of Tepeyac, *la Santa Patrona de los Mexicanos*, Empress of the Americas, Mother of the True God, Mother of the Giver of Life, Mother of the Lord of Near and Far, Mother of the Lord of Heaven and Earth, Mother Who Never Turns Her Back, Sister in Suffering, Subversive Virgin, Undocumented Virgin, *la tele Virgen*, "the sustainer of life, the one who protects us against danger, the one who comforts our sorrows," she who "understands everything," Our Lady of the Cannery Workers, Vessel of the Indigenous Spirit, *Madrecita, la madre querida, la Morenita, la Diosa*, Guadalupe-Tonantzin, Ms. Lupe, *la Virgencita, la Virgencita tan bella*, the Virgin of Guadalupe.



Poet and novelist Ana Castillo commissioned a distinguished group of mainly Latino artists and writers, at "the end of a millennium of migrations, miscegenation, conquests, and endless hope and prayer," to contemplate Guadalupe anew. Many found the invitation troubling, Castillo reports, and the evidence of the essays is that they had reason to be apprehensive. These are not works of sweet nostalgia and childhood memory but fierce, troubled, and troubling accounts of the writers' reengagement with *la Morenita* in the circumstances of their lives now, often long after some of them had rejected her. The essays, poetry, and fiction in this extraordinary collection record what becomes possible and necessary in the presence of *la Virgencita*, what experiences, perceptions, and feelings she makes accessible. As Felipe Ehrenberg says, in her "elongated, seedlike, vulva-shaped figure," *la Lupe* offers "unending possibilities of transformation." The book is an enactment of the transformative power of this encounter.

Guadalupe-Tonantzin is a boundary-crossing *mestiza*, a woman of mixed

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European and Indian ancestry. When she appeared on the sacred hill to Cuauhtlatóhuac/Juan Diego she was already pregnant with a new race; she embodies traditions and wounds of the past, the violence and courage of the present, and the hopes of the future, at once of Mexico and of the families and individuals that call on her. She has the power to dissolve the common boundaries of time and space and the usual categories of self; the distinction between past and present, here and there, now and then evaporates in her presence. "I am snuggled under a thick Mexican wool blanket," Rubén Martínez finds when he accepts Castillo's invitation, "warm as in the womb, at my grandparents' house late at night." Castillo curls up again in the lap of her *abuelita*, "nestling my head against her sagging breasts, and feeling the eternal, abounding assurance of Our Mother from her warm breath on my brow." Each of the essays speaks with multiple voices—the writers seem to be all their ages at once, to be writing from both sides of the border, in all possible attitudes toward the Virgin, simultaneously trangressive and humbly obedient, child and parent and grandparent. *La Morenita* makes the self protean. Some of the writers are shocked to find this happening to them, and the works record their resistance to *la Virgencita's* enduring power in their experience even as they are "dazed by her beauty," as Liliana Valenzuela writes, "and the warmth emanating from her."

The *cholos* have one thing right: Guadalupe lives on the skin, in the vulnerable, sexy, wounded, strong body. Many of the works are deeply erotic, both in their imagining of *la Virgencita tan bella* and in their reports of what opens up in the self standing before her. This will not shock or surprise anyone who has been to a shrine and witnessed the desires that the Madonna and saints provoke and sanction. Devotionalism is the space where the body, otherwise denied, insists on itself in Catholic cultures. The pervasive eroticism of the collection reminds us that devotionalism is the embodiment of desire and that prayer is desire's search for a voice with which to speak to God and the saints. It challenges any attempt to draw a line between the erotic and the political, moreover, or to construe devotionalism and a commitment to social justice as competing, even antithetical, forms of Catholic experience. The erotic here signals the refusal of the writers to be rendered other by an image of the sacred that excludes or denies them or that would prohibit them, for whatever politically repressive, racist, homophobic reason, from living inside their skins. What he loved most about the huge statue of *la Morenita* in his grandmother's living room in L.A., Martínez writes, was that "her olive skin, tinged with the glow of the omnipresent red light, was as dark as my own." This recognition of the Virgin's skin becomes the ground of the confidence to resist and to imagine otherwise. Not surprisingly, Guadalupe has been showing her skin again to her people in the wake of Proposition 187, California's anti-immigration referendum.

Guillermo Gómez-Peña says that the Guadalupe of this collection is the creation of this side of the border. To become "American Catholic" once meant, among other things, to turn away from the dark-skinned, full-bodied madonnas, who seemed to bear the weight of histories too heavy for this culture, toward the thin, pale blue virgins of suburban parishes. But it is a fact of Catholic history that the tradition has always existed in relation to the chthonic it has absorbed around the world. To read this only as a history of conquest denies the resilient—erotic—imagination and spirituality of Cuauhtlatóhuac/Juan Diego. Catholic culture is fundamentally constituted by what anthropologist Lawrence Taylor, writing about contemporary Ireland, calls the "ancient dialectic" between the "edge" and the "center," or what the Virgin of Guadalupe discloses as the truth and power of the *mestizo*. □

Robert Orsi's *most recent book is* Thank You, Saint Jude *(Yale). He teaches at Indiana University.*

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Forgetting Whose We Are

Alzheimer's Disease and the Love of God

David Keck

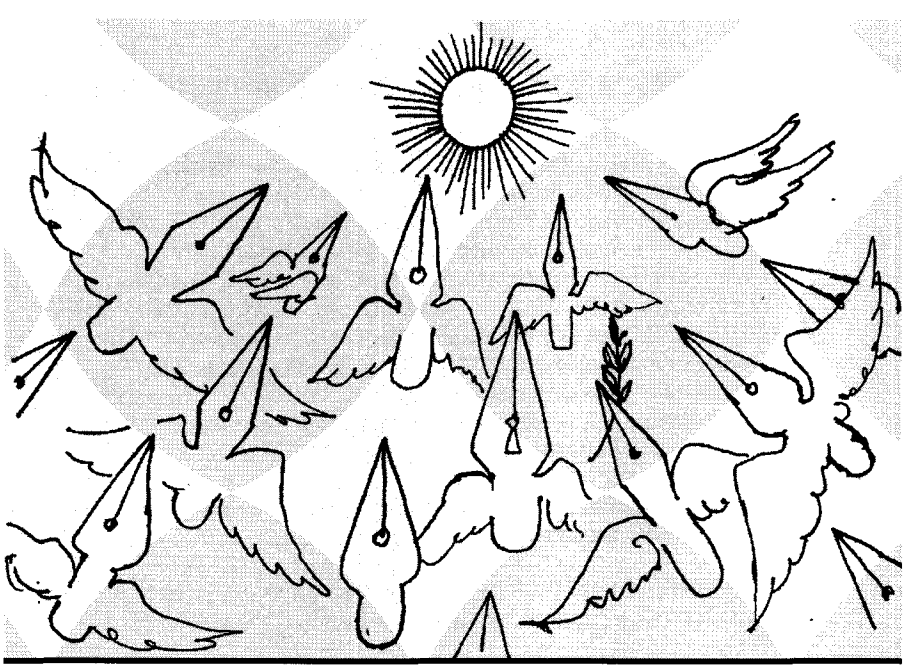
Abingdon, $19.95, 255 pp.

Robert P. Imbelli

In a recent review in these pages, Luke Timothy Johnson lamented the absence, in so much contemporary theology, of "the robust and even passionate willingness to speak in direct and first-person discourse"; its hesitancy "to embrace...the language of faith as something more than another hypothesis" (December 20, 1996). David Keck's book is an encouraging exception to the dismal situation which Johnson describes—an exception all the more remarkable in that its focus is a disease that severely tests faith's language and content.

Impelled by his mother's affliction with Alzheimer's disease and its destructive toll upon patient and caregivers alike, Keck, son of New Testament scholar Leander Keck and a historian in his own right, has written a profoundly poignant but, ultimately, hopeful book. He offers nothing less than "an Alzheimer's hermeneutic on the love of God": a perspective upon the Christian faith tradition from the vantage of an experience of almost overwhelming tragedy. Yet one finishes this courageous work with a renewed sense of the rare beauty of everyday life, the undeniable darkness of death in its many forms, and the unique and scarcely comprehensible promise of resurrection.

Fundamental for Keck is the importance of orthodoxy and canon, the rooting of Christian imagination and praxis in the soil of Scripture and tradition: "aligning one's own life and memories with the life and memories of the church." Such orthodoxy, embracing both authentic worship and authentic teaching, supplies neither facile answers nor merely rote formularies, but provides "that which most illuminates my sense of my mother's inextinguishable personhood, my own sinfulness, and God's creative and redemptive love but also that which best strengthens my desire and capacity to be faithful to her and to God."



Considerations of "method" that endlessly consume much contemporary theology play a more modest role for Keck as prelude to his substantive discussions. His central consideration of "method as memory" acknowledges the disintegration of memory and hence of personal identity that marks Alzheimer's and make it so radical a challenge to faith and theology. At the same time he confesses and raises to new prominence the integrative power of the church's memory founded upon and daily rehearsing the saving acts of God. We remember because God has first remembered us. Faithful Christian prayer and practice is our attunement to God's own memory, effected as much with our bodies as with our minds.

Keck's hermeneutic thus heralds a significant shift away from modern theology's preoccupation with the self, its vaunted "turn to the subject," originating with Descartes and Kant and often resulting in a dualism of mind and body. Here the self is viewed almost exclusively from the vantage of consciousness and cognitive knowledge, the very dimensions of selfhood most assaulted by Alzheimer's dementia. By contrast, Keck seeks to recover an older tradition's notion of "soul," that substratum of selfhood whereby we are held by God, whatever our conscious experience and cognitive capability. In Keck's parsing of the "grammar of soul," not *who* we are, but *whose* we are becomes the ultimate point of reference.

What emerges is a less autonomous, more relational sense of selfhood. We are truly constituted by our relations: most fundamentally by our relation to the God whose we are, but also to all the others with whom we share life and love. In this reading the reality of church comes into fuller relief, not as a merely voluntary association of autonomous individuals, but as the very sacrament of relationship: communion with God and with one another in Christ.

For Alzheimer's patients and their families the traditional notion of the church as the body of Christ transcends metaphor. Church is our incorporation

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into a deeper truth, the vehicle of our vicarious memory, the witness to a hope that sustains. It is all this because, like John the Baptist, it constantly points beyond itself to the one whose memory it bears, the true and faithful witness who is the foundation of its hope.

Jesus Christ is the church's memory, the one who fills and fulfills its liturgical *anamnesis*. In his death and Resurrection he has embraced all the darkness of our sin and sorrow and opened to it the promise of eternal light and life. He is the sure promise of things hoped for and the reality of things unseen. Christ is the church's substance and treasure and his paschal mystery reveals the structure of true selfhood. But it is the scandal of a selfhood first dissolved upon the Cross, before being raised to new and transformed life. Keck echoes the canonical tradition in this crucial conviction: "God is found primarily on the Cross"; and our calling, as disciples, is "to become matured in the mystery of the Cross."

Amazingly, though taking its orientation from the dire straits of Alzheimer's disease, Keck's book is neither grim nor constricted. His inclusive Christocentrism expands into a sensitive meditation upon beauty and the "canonical imagination" that is open to receive with gratitude whatever intimations of God's glory can be discerned in the art and poetry of diverse cultures. Alzheimer's patients often manifest a heightened sense of beauty. Music can communicate even when words fail. And caregivers, in the patient attentiveness of their service, often display a poet's touch that surpasses the power of words.

Finally, in face of Alzheimer's assault upon the continuity and connectedness of narrative, Keck, with almost Augustinian boldness, traces a Christological reading of history. In telling and retelling the story of Christ, the church confesses that his is the comprehensive story that recapitulates, gathers into fulfillment, all human stories. Indeed, those who appear most marginalized are accorded by Christ the place of honor in God's own story. Therefore the church testifies, in the light of Christ, that "caregiving lies at the heart of history, because agapic love lies at the heart of proper human relationships." An Alzheimer's hermeneutic, paradoxically, illuminates our common condition: humanity's deep need, God's amazing grace.

Rarely does one encounter theological insight so happily wed to pastoral experience, reflections on the sublime cheek-by-jowl with references to "wiping fannies." But in questions of life and death caregivers realize there is scant time to be fastidious. In the Incarnation, God, for our salvation, refuses to be fastidious. □

Robert P. Imbelli, *a priest of the archdiocese of New York, teaches theology at Boston College.*

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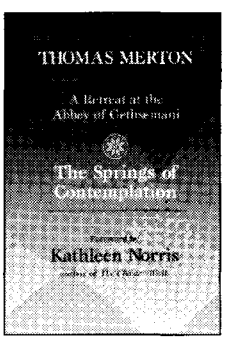

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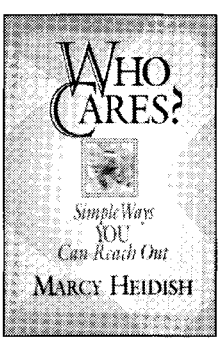

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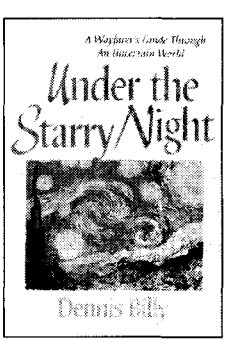

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Robert Alter
Norton, $25, 324 pp.

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Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg
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Edward T. Oakes

For my money the best Old Testament scholar of the twentieth century was Yehezkel Kaufmann, a Russian Jew who emigrated to Palestine in 1920 and became professor of Bible at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He subsequently wrote a six-volume history, in Hebrew, of the religion of ancient Israel, only a much-abridged version of which was ever translated into English.

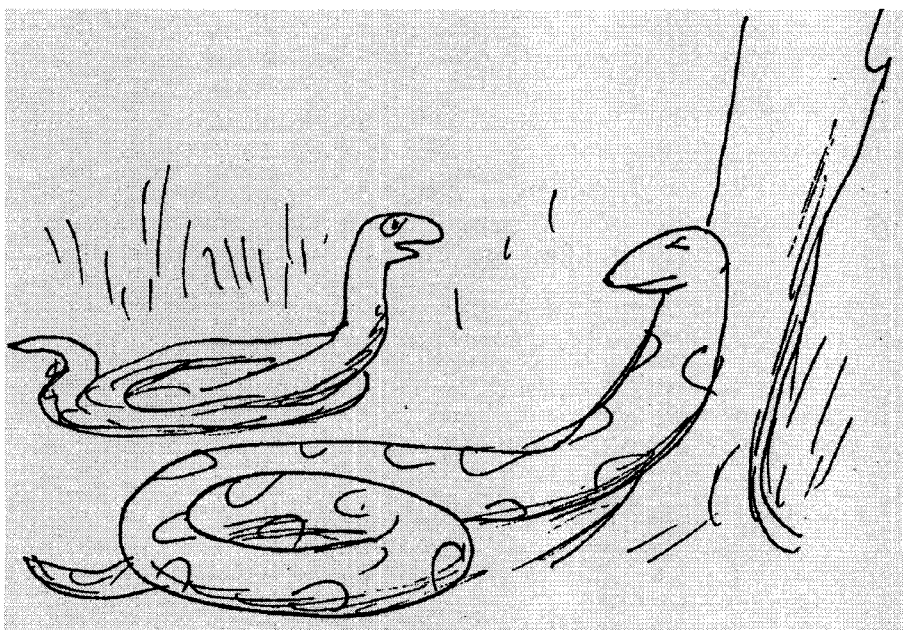
But even that truncated husk of Kaufmann's original was enough to show the English-speaking world what Old Testament scholarship can look like when freed of the Hegelian hammerlock that became so dominant in the German scholarship of the nineteenth century, a developmental outlook on historical causation that then went on to influence almost all the rest of later scholarship (much to its detriment, in my opinion). In contrast to the vague evolutionism of the German school, Kaufmann was able to show—without ever straying from strict historical-critical principles—that Israel did not *grow* into its monotheism: its religion neither arose from a "dialectic" with its neighbors nor did it achieve its final (universal) monotheism because of the later influence of the more theologically elaborate and self-consciously literary prophets. And correlatively, whatever conceptual borrowings Israel made from its Near Eastern environment, these borrowings were fitted into a world view that *from the outset* was at fundamental odds with the mythological polytheism of its neighbors.

Crucially, in pagan religion the gods have a genealogy: they are *born* and, in most tellings, usually take over the pantheon by usurping the earlier generation of divinities, as when Zeus rebelled against his father Chronos. But the God of the Hebrews, in Kaufmann's lapidary words, "has no pedigree, fathers no generations; he neither inherits nor bequeaths his authority. He does not die and is not resurrected. He has no sexual qualities or desires and shows no need of or dependence upon powers outside himself."

Reading Kaufmann makes clear how revolutionary the book of Genesis has been to the religious legacy of humanity, how at a single stroke it altered the implicit metaphysical presuppositions of paganism, and how much contemporary scholarship misses the point if it is solely bent on tracing *influences* and not radical *differences*. Upon reflection, it is obvious that if the gods have a genealogy, the world-womb out of which they were born is greater than themselves, and so "in myth the gods appear not only as actors but as acted upon. Fate, says myth, apportions lots to the gods as well as to men." This is also why the gods are not only sexually differentiated but are subject to sexual needs, desiring and mating with each other; moreover, they eat and drink, fall sick and require healing, need and invent tools, etc.

When I first read Kaufmann I asked myself why these perfectly obvious truths seemed to be slighted in other scholarship: Was it Kaufmann's native fluency in Hebrew, his Jewishness, or his innocence of schooling in the German/Hegelian tradition? I do not have answers to these questions, but they provide, I believe, the right context for understanding the vividness, clarity, and insight available in these two books under review. Here, under Alter's and Zornberg's ministrations, Genesis looks *different*, startlingly different.

Alter's book is first and foremost a translation—and only secondarily a commentary. But as Kaufmann was for history of religions, Alter is to translation: a man uniquely positioned to counteract the tendentious posturing of most other modern translations and the extratextual spin-doctoring of, for example, so many panelists in the recent PBS



"Not the serpent in the garden?"

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talk-fest on Genesis hosted by Bill Moyers, too many of whom would indulge in embarrassing fatuities like accusing Abraham of child abuse, etc. It is hard to describe in the space of a short review the many felicities of this remarkable translation, but surely Alter's dual competence as biblical scholar and literary critic has uniquely positioned him to give us a translation that is both vigorous and contemporary.

My only regret in reading this work is to realize how much the translation of the whole Bible nowadays transcends the capacities of any one individual, at least if the translator wants to take into consideration the vast expanse of recent research in biblical semantics and philology. For the churches and synagogues desperately need a translation of *all* the books of the Bible of this quality. Although the Revised Standard Version is still the best overall translation of the whole Bible, Alter convincingly shows in his introduction, but more especially in the success of the translation itself, that the time has come for a fresh rendering, one that is vivid, vigorous, biblical—and so completely contemporary that one does not notice the language but lives in the telling of the story itself.

Avivah Zornberg's reflections on Genesis are as different from Alter's approach as might be imagined: where he is sober, she is expansive; where he insists on the spare narrative, she builds on those later embellished narratives called *midrashim*. This habit of expanding on the biblical material grew up in Jewish Bible-based cultures because of a feature everyone immediately notices about so many biblical narratives, especially those in Genesis: their laconic telling. So brief, so spare are the narrative interventions of most biblical tales that they positively invite later elaboration.

Because of what struck me as, on the whole, the rather silly things some of the panelists said on Moyers's special on Genesis, I have grown rather leery of specifically modern embellishments on Genesis and so I approached this book with wariness. My fears were misplaced. Not only is Zornberg's book leagues removed from popular trivializations, it does what all successful midrash is meant to do: open up new perspectives on ancient texts. She does not weave her tales from whole-spun modern cloth, leaving the reader with a queasy feeling of just having watched a soap opera of negligent fathers and neurotically repressed mothers; rather she takes only traditional semicanonical *midrashim* for her theme. Indeed this is the usual practice in many Jewish homes that have a weekly study group: the "Bible" they study is the Bible and the semicanonized tradition of stories that go with them.

And fascinating they are! Abraham, for example, is a "philosopher" who comes to monotheism through rational speculation and then smashes his father's idols in disgust. In another version, Abraham is living the high-life: he feasts and entertains but neglects to sacrifice to God, and when Satan points this remission out to the good Lord, God is provoked to ask Abraham to atone for this negligence by sacrificing his son. Sarah swoons and dies when she hears of her son being bound to the altar; in another story Isaac goes blind on the altar because the tears of angels falling from heaven at his plight get into his eyes. (Although she does not mention it, some of Zornberg's stories have interesting parallels with those in Greek mythology: Niobe's tears, Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia, the wife who died of grief under the mistaken impression her husband had died in the Trojan War, etc.)

This book also casts a rather uncomfortable glare on modern sensibilities. Because the *midrashim* Zornberg selects for her treatment are all traditional, they provide a refreshing alternative to modern homiletic sentimentality. (How has God suddenly become so nice in all our preaching?) And while the comments she makes on these *midrashim* ransack contemporary authors (Ricœur, Kermode, Kafka, etc.), these authors usually have something disconcertingly, well, Kafka-esque to add—a dimension which is very much in line with the midrash tradition itself, where indeed Kafka got so much of his material and his sensibility. And that only highlights how far we have moved from the inner world of the Bible. It's going to be a long haul back up Milton's Mount Moriah again, whence alone we can sense the majesty of Genesis in all its radiant distinction and eerie difference from us. □

Edward T. Oakes, S.J., *is associate professor of religious studies at Regis University in Denver, Colorado. The paperback edition of his book* Pattern of Redemption: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar *has just appeared from Continuum.*

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CONVERSIONS

Ken Colston

Now that the University of Kentucky's men's basketball team, the Wildcats, is defending its national title (and still eligible for the NCAA tournament), it is time to reflect on the profound correlation between Roman Catholicism and college basketball. I am a true believer.

I was received into the church a few years ago when UK was on probation for recruiting violations. In my penitence, I realized then that the Catholic liturgical calendar recapitulates the NCAA schedule. The first Sunday of Advent, the beginning of the church year, falls on the annual UK-Indiana matchup CBS always bills as the beginning of something big; the regular-season conference games after Epiphany coincide with Ordinary Time; the grueling, life-or-death tournaments get fought out during the most austere hours of Lent; and the chosen Final Four rise with our Lord around Easter. This couldn't be *mere* coincidence. For me, this parallel is a compelling apology for Christianity by an updated argument from design.

But of course my heart had already been prepared for the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic" faith: I just had to recall the religious struggles of my father for clear radio and television reception to follow his beloved 'Cats.

It was the 1960s in northern Kentucky. We lived at the foot of a curving hill that God had placed between us and the air waves from both Louisville and Cincinnati to test the depth of our commitment. Invariably, on a wickedly cold night around Ash Wednesday, WHAS would come in so poorly on our electric Sears tube that my father would have to go outside and use his car transistor—to listen to a mere conference game!

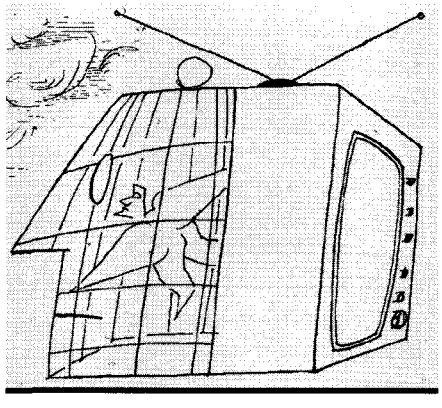
He'd freeze out there by himself, risking frostbite and carbon-monoxide poisoning, warmed by no more than a pack of Winstons and the heater set on low lest it drown out the crooning play-by-play of Cawood Ledford. Inside, I could follow the course of the game by listening to how the little Ford Fairline six-cylinder idled. If it whined high, I knew the 'Cats were on a ten-point run; if it revved down, the squad's outside shooting had gone cold. And if once in a blue moon tires squealed and the car tore off, I knew that, for one night at least, the order of the universe had been upset. The 'Cats had blown a big lead or choked at the end, and my poor old man was off to Dutch Eddie's Saloon to drown his sorrows and the 'Cats' disgrace.

Occasionally, when by providence Channel 7 out of Dayton was carrying UK versus Duke or Marquette, my father would head up over the hill to its northeast side and my grandfather's house. With an hour's worth of fiddling, ten yards of aluminum foil, and a few prayers, he could make his father-in-law's thirteen-inch *circa* 1954 Motorola black-and-white pick up the wispiest shadow of the game.

"The picture ain't going to hold," I'd say with the impatience of a doubtful adolescent.

"Have faith," he'd whisper gently.

The lights were dimmed, the telephone was off the hook, and the three of us leaned forward on our knees. If the 'Cats stole the ball, I'd whoop out an "Alleluia," the picture would explode into a blizzard of static, and my father would shush me quiet with a glare, go rub the aluminum foil, baby the Motorola, and will that game back into being.



Since the games we hijacked were frequently far along in the tournament, too often we'd only get to see Kentucky lose. But those annual death experiences informed my soul two decades before my conversion. Christians await a Second Coming; a UK fan knows what it means to wait for certain glory. 1975, 1984, 1992, 1993, 1995: all losses, by a few points, by a few seconds, or by a total breakdown. But finally came last year's Eastertide bonanza.

Even though my father finally has a national title under his belt and reliable cable reception at home, his game face still hasn't changed. It's still pale when UK is behind and all feverish when the 'Cats get hot. It's the face of a man who will die a little if his team loses—a face stricken with fear and ready to resort to prayer, the face of a parent sitting up with a sick child.

I can't explain it. I don't know what could turn a no-nonsense tobacco farmer into a silly sports fan, or his atheist son into a Roman Catholic. I can't explain why a Kentucky cousin of mine shattered his television with an unopened six-pack in reaction to a coaching blunder, or why I still let out a whoop when a UK game comes over my short-wave radio. All I know is that the same mysterious foolishness blows the dying embers of love and need and belief; and they can never be entirely ridiculous. □

Ken Colston *teaches Latin, French, and English at the Thomas Jefferson School in Saint Louis, Missouri. He also coaches girls' basketball.*

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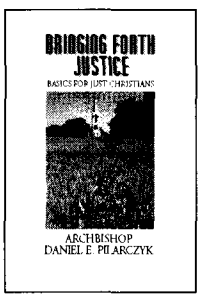

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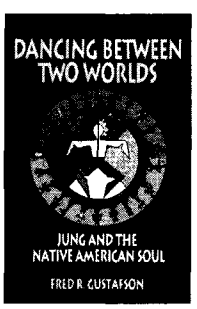

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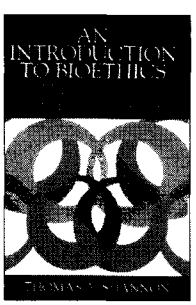

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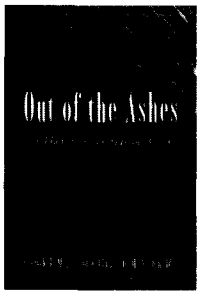

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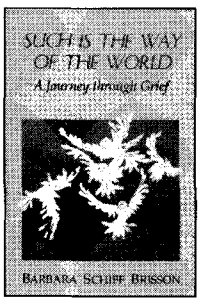

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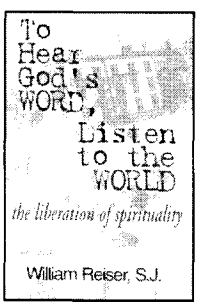

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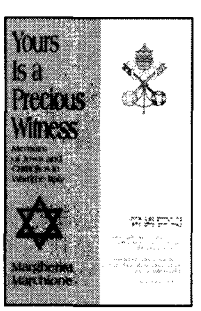

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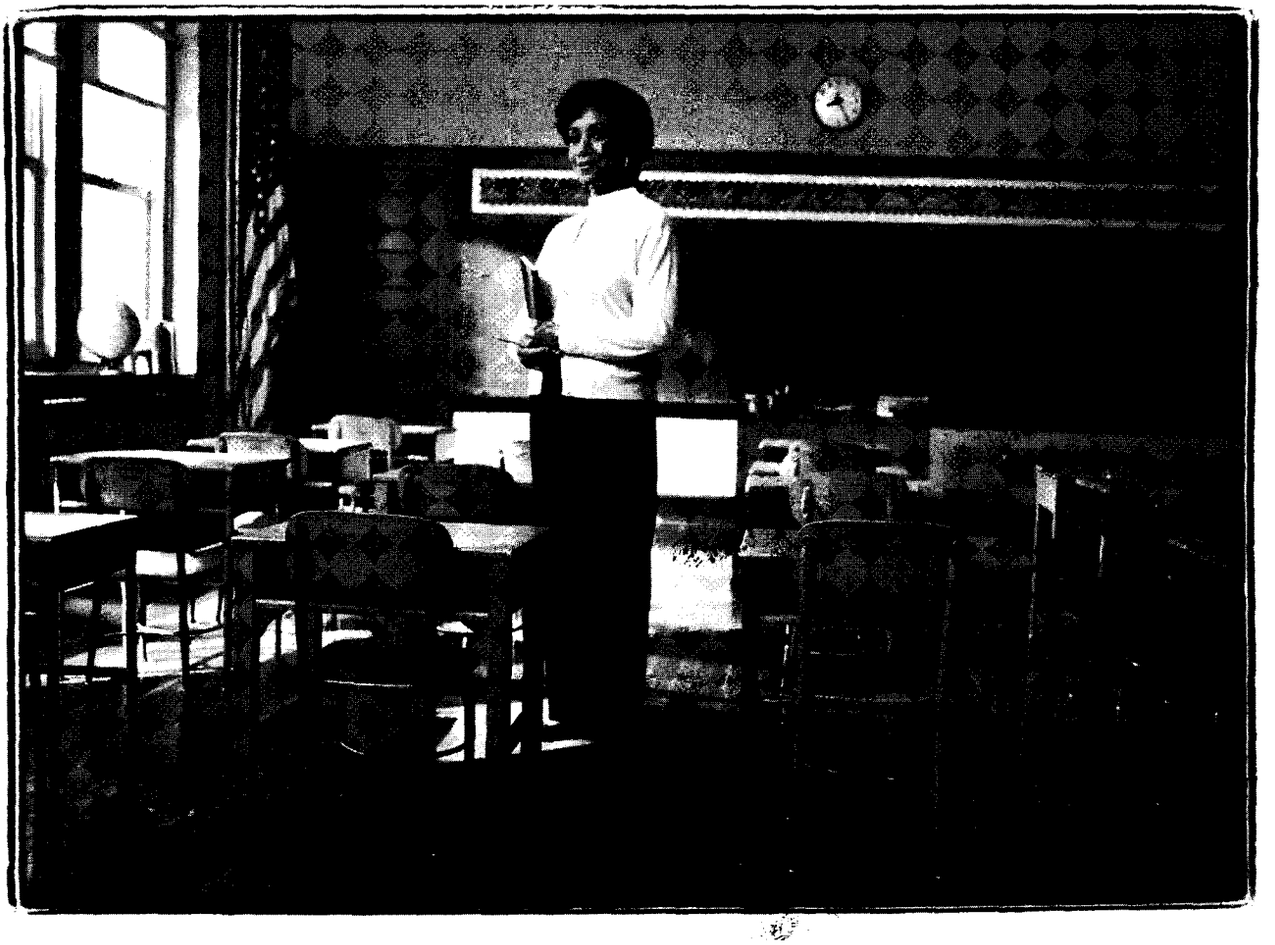

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